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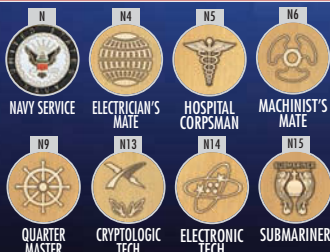
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Two unknown sailors recovered from the turret of USS *Monitor* are given full military funeral honors at Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia on March 8. The Union ship sank in rough seas off Cape Hatteras, N.C., nine months after it fought CSS *Virginia* on March 9, 1862, in the first battle between ironclad warships.

U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Todd Frantom

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**ADVERTISING SALES** James G. Elliott Company, Inc.  
**NEW YORK** (212) 588-9200  
**DETROIT** (248) 530-0300  
**CHICAGO** (312) 236-4900  
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Copyright 2013 by The American Legion

The American Legion (ISSN 0886-1234) is published monthly by The American Legion, 5745 Lee Road, Indianapolis, IN 46216. Periodicals postage paid at Indianapolis, IN 46204 and additional mailing offices.

**POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to The American Legion, Data Services, P.O. Box 1954, Indianapolis, IN 46206.

Canada Post International Publications Mail (Canadian Distribution) Sales Agreement No. PM40063731. Return Undeliverable Canadian Addresses to: Station A, P.O. Box, Windsor ON N9A 6J5. Re-entered second-class mail matter at Manila Central Post Office dated Dec. 22, 1991.



Printed in USA  
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*The Magazine for a Strong America*

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**‘The Mysteries of Tonkin Gulf’**

John Prados’ article suggests that North Vietnam never had plans for an armed takeover of South Vietnam, and that it only moved to counter U.S. aggression. This contradicts everything I’ve read over the past 40 years about that conflict, from both U.S. and North Vietnamese perspectives. Ho Chi Minh, Gen. Vo Nguyen Giap, Le Duan and the Politburo all planned what they euphemistically called “unification” with the south, first by armed terrorist insurgency and finally with main NVA forces. I think they were united in their goal and only differed in their preferred tactics. U.S. involvement simply lent a sense of urgency.

– Scott Anderson, Green Valley, Ariz.

We were fooled in 1964 with the Gulf of Tonkin incident, and again in 2003 with weapons of mass destruction and al-Qaida in Iraq. We owe it to the dead, wounded and maimed in both contrived wars to make sure we don’t get fooled again.

– Anthony Just, Butler, Pa.

I was a crypto operator aboard *Ticonderoga* during both incidents, and was involved in all messages sent out and received that were “secret” and above. As you might guess, I was very interested in this article. Except for a lot of detail and fear at the time of the incident, it was very accurate.

– Randy Speelman, Palm Harbor, Fla.

I submit an update to Prados’ statement that only one American died during Operation Pierce Arrow. A U.S. sailor also died: Aviation Ordnanceman 1st Class Joe Lee Williams, who perished on USS *Ticonderoga* during the rearming of the aircraft involved in the strikes. His death is acknowledged on the Wall. I was his division officer at the time.

– Leland Thornburgh,  
West Des Moines, Iowa



AP

I vividly remember the night when President Lyndon Johnson announced that because North Vietnamese motor torpedo boats attacked *Maddox* and *C. Turner Joy* in international waters in the Gulf of Tonkin, this act would be met by swift retaliation against North Vietnam. Thus began the bloody Vietnam War, in which 58,000 U.S. servicemembers were killed and 304,000 wounded.

Many of us, by virtue of our Navy training, knew early on that this war was started based on the bogus sonar contact reported by *C. Turner Joy* on Aug. 6. After the fall of Saigon in 1975, documentaries on the Vietnam War started appearing. As a sonarman first class, I was amazed to see that the weather conditions at the time of the incident were stormy, with strong winds and high waves. I talked to fellow sonarmen with whom I served, and we all agreed that the foul weather would have swamped out any audio or video on the sonar gear. Pearl Harbor and 9/11 clearly required us to go to war, but certainly not a mythical Gulf of Tonkin sonar contact.

– Jerry Mazenko, Garden Grove, Calif.



Having been in *C. Turner Joy's* combat information center on Aug. 4, 1964, I'm sorry to see John Prados continue to perpetuate the widely accepted myth that no attack occurred that night in the Gulf of Tonkin.

Robert C. Barnhart Jr., who died last December, was a commander at the time, not a lieutenant commander. As for the NSA official history, it proceeds in part from the erroneous assumption made in a Sept. 3, 1964, NSA assessment that there was a virtual absence of North Vietnamese tracking of the U.S. destroyers on Aug. 3-4. That does not square with shipboard electronic counter-measures intercepts of North Vietnamese radar emissions, some emanating from one or more "shadowing" *Swatow* patrol boats, indicating that Hanoi's naval command knew where we were on the date of the second reported attack.

It's fashionable to cite Task Group Commander Capt. John J. Herrick's officially expressed doubts about some of the sonar readings called out that night. But the official record is quite clear that even within the time frame in which he expressed those doubts, he nonetheless considered that an attack had occurred. That was confirmed in a comment, heard by at least one second party, that he made to Barnhart during a post-incident refueling with *Ticonderoga*: "Thanks, Bob, for saving my ass out there." He went on to recommend Barnhart for a Silver Star for the action; he received a Bronze Star.

It's not surprising that pilots failed to see hostile PTs on that moonless, squally night. Post-incident night exercises off Da Nang indicated that shipboard-controlled aircraft were more often than not unable to see "target" PTs even when vectored directly on top of them. Various indications of a night attack at sea – including a torpedo wake, machine-gun fire, black smoke rising from a target taken under fire, a searchlight and a silhouette of a craft matching the description of a Soviet-designed P-4 PT boat – were witnessed by personnel on our bridge, the signal bridge, and the fore and aft fire control stations. A wholly independent and thorough investigation initiated by the commander of the 7th Fleet concluded that an attack had occurred.

– Jim Treanor, Corvallis, Ore.

### 'A Sacred Priority'

I enjoyed Jeff Stoffer's story on the Legion in Ireland (March). Congratulations to all the Legionnaires there providing support to our deceased veterans and their families.

– Alfred Rogers, Hazelwood, Mo.

I am an immigrant son of County Kerry, and proudly served in the Air Force from 1960 to 1964. My uncle served in Patton's Army and was all over Europe. My younger brother served in the Air Force from 1963 to 1967, and spent 30 years in the Massachusetts Air National Guard. All three of us were born in Waterville.

– Michael L. O'Sullivan, Wilmington, Mass.

### 'The Will to Drill'

Current gasoline prices are but the forerunner of things to come if our government does not realistically address America's energy dependence. The first thing to do is build the Keystone pipeline from Canada/North Dakota to Texas. The second is to relax drilling restrictions in the Gulf of Mexico and off Florida, California and Alaska. The last is expedited approvals of new refineries as they come before the appropriate government agencies. I firmly believe that America can become energy independent, with resulting realistic gasoline prices, if our government will intelligently address the problem.

– Gary H. Boyd, Scottsdale, Ariz.

Government-funded research and development has yielded myriad benefits. When something new is explored, there will always be failures. As for subsidies, for how long and what amount has the oil industry taken from the government trough? If the costs attributable to oil were attached to the product – such as a charge for polluting – oil would not be so cheap. Shale oil deposits are far more dirty. Oil has been subsidized by the government since its discovery, thus hiding its true cost. The XL pipeline will aid and abet dirty oil.

Scientists largely agree that global warming is real, man is the cause, and the window to address it is getting smaller. Those who disagree with science do so for one reason: money.

– Leon Logan, Tucumcari, N.M.

## THE AMERICAN LEGION MAGAZINE WELCOMES YOUR OPINIONS

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# The importance of remembrance

I remember Lonnie Weisheit like I saw him yesterday.

He'd be about my age now, probably with grandchildren. Yet he lives in my memory as the smiling, dark-haired 20-year-old who went through Army basic training with me at Fort Knox, Ky., and advanced infantry training at Fort Ord, Calif. We both went to Vietnam. I came home. Lonnie didn't.

Every time I'm in Washington, D.C., I go to the Wall to honor the 58,282 Americans killed in the war and the thousands more injured or still missing. On Panel 9W, Row 77, is Lonnie's name. The letters, etched in granite, are a lasting tribute. But I can't help but see beyond them to the young corporal who grew up in Lynnville, Ind., 10 miles from my hometown, and was killed by enemy fire at Hua Nghia. He was someone's son, and he was my friend.

In one more generation, most of us who knew Lonnie and all the others we lost in Vietnam will be gone. Even now, we're holding fast to the few who have firsthand memories of those who died in World War II and Korea. On a day not too far off, our last living connections to these wars will be severed, and their dead will forever belong to history.

The responsibility of remembrance falls to all of us – not just The American Legion and other veterans organizations, not just those serving in uniform, but every man, woman and child who woke up this morning in the land of the free. It's a fading priority, though, in this busy, fast-changing world where the meaning of Memorial Day is drowned out by mattress sales and barbecues.

More than ever, our elected leaders must set the example by making sure our military is able to render proper honors to the nation's fallen. Instead, sequestration threatens to encroach on this sacred obligation. At home and around the world, U.S. forces are still fighting on our behalf and protecting us at home, but with far less. That means hard choices about where the money goes, so we can expect diminished representation in this year's Memorial Day observances. No flyovers. Limited troop formations. Fewer bands playing the national anthem.

In Europe, where some 101,000 American soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines are buried, this is embarrassing. Many U.S. cemeteries will have only a color guard and one military officer as guest speaker. The largest of these, the Meuse-Argonne, is the site of the U.S. Army's deadliest battle, with 26,277 killed and 95,786 wounded. For the first time, the Army won't have a presence at the ceremony there.

Some may see these as unnecessary expenses, but consider that during the Great Depression, the United States built eight federal monuments on foreign soil commemorating Americans who fought in World War I. Congress paid for Gold Star Mothers to make a pilgrimage to their sons' graves overseas. What message do we send to other nations when giving full honor to our war dead is suddenly subject to the budget axe? What does it say to the men and women serving today?

Remembering the fallen in a manner befitting their sacrifice is not a luxury. It is our solemn duty. These aren't the kind of budget cuts Americans want.

*James E. "Jim" Koutz*



National Commander  
James E. Koutz

## MEMORANDA

### LEST WE FORGET

In 1920, Legionnaires helped establish the American Overseas Memorial Day Association (AOMDA), which decorates the graves of U.S. war dead in Europe and nearly 200 isolated burial sites. The organization also supports Memorial Day activities at these cemeteries. To become a member or learn more about its mission, visit AOMDA's website.

[www.aomda.com](http://www.aomda.com)

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## PAUL E. GALANTI

**BRANCH OF SERVICE:** Navy

**YEARS:** 1958-1982

**MOS:** Naval Aviator

**RANK AT DISCHARGE:** Commander

### DECORATIONS

- Silver Star
- Legion of Merit with "V" (2)
- Bronze Star with "V"
- Air Medal (2)
- Meritorious Service Medal
- Navy Commendation Medal
- Navy Achievement Medal
- Purple Heart (2)

### AMERICAN LEGION POST

Post 84, Westhampton, Va.

**NUMBER OF YEARS IN THE LEGION:** 20

Galanti speaks on behalf of many veterans service organizations, including The American Legion, sharing the story of the 97 combat missions he flew in an A-4 Skyhawk before he was shot down and captured near Vinh, North Vietnam, on June 17, 1966. He was a prisoner at the infamous "Hanoi Hilton" for nearly seven years and was released on Feb. 12, 1973.

Watch an interview with Paul Galanti online:

 [www.legion.org/magazine](http://www.legion.org/magazine)





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EMAIL ADDRESS

BIRTH DATE

SIGNATURE

☐ MASTERCARD

☐ VISA

ACCOUNT #

EXPIRATION DATE

#### DATES OF SERVICE

- ☐ AUG. 2, 1990 – PRESENT
- ☐ DEC. 20, 1989 – JAN. 31, 1990
- ☐ AUG. 24, 1982 – JUL. 31, 1984
- ☐ FEB. 28, 1961 – MAY 7, 1975
- ☐ JUNE 25, 1950 – JAN. 31, 1955
- ☐ DEC. 7, 1941 – DEC. 31, 1946
- ☐ APR. 6, 1917 – NOV. 11, 1918

#### BRANCH OF SERVICE

- ☐ U.S. ARMY
- ☐ U.S. NAVY
- ☐ U.S. AIR FORCE
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# Defund public broadcasting



## SUPPORT

**Rep. Doug Lamborn,  
R-Colo.**

■ Lamborn is a member of the House Armed Services Committee.



## OPPOSE

**Rep. Earl Blumenauer,  
D-Ore.**

■ Blumenauer is chairman and founder of the Public Broadcasting Caucus.

Big Bird may be some Americans' favorite fowl, but he and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) are fully capable of making it on their own. As Mitt Romney noted in last fall's presidential debates, if we have to borrow money from China to pay for something and ask our children to pay it back, we probably cannot afford it. And that's the case with public broadcasting.

Federal contributions to CPB, the parent organization for the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) and National Public Radio (NPR), totaled \$444 million in fiscal 2012. In recent years, those federal subsidies have amounted to about 18 percent of PBS' total funding and as little as 2 percent of NPR's annual budget.

According to *Forbes*, the sale of Sesame Street-brand products brought in \$47 million in royalty receipts last year, helping boost Sesame Workshop's net worth to \$365 million.

Since the start of the Great Recession in 2007, American families have seen median incomes drop by more than 8 percent. During that same period, federal spending for public broadcasting increased by 11 percent.

If, as President Obama claims, we need more fairness, I hardly think it is fair for American families to tighten their belts while wealthy Big Bird and his friends get a hefty raise.

Last year, the House passed my bill, H.R. 1076, which seeks to eliminate federal funding for NPR. While the Senate has not taken action on that bill, a House Appropriations subcommittee passed a funding bill in July that would put CPB on a path toward self-sufficiency. This year's funding bill reduces advance funds for the next two years, and in the third year ends federal subsidies altogether.

It's time for taxpayers to ask Big Bird to move out of the nest.

Certain factions of our government are once again targeting public broadcasting. This is not about the budget deficit; if all programs had suffered the 13-percent cut public broadcasting has already absorbed, the deficit would be \$500 billion smaller. Further dismantling it would

only infinitesimally reduce the budget deficit but would rob millions of Americans – including children in poor, rural areas and seniors who cannot afford expensive commercial cable on a fixed

income – of the most trusted source of news and educational broadcasting.

Those attacking public broadcasting claim that it would be able to serve its mission without federal support. However, a study demanded by critics in Congress revealed that there is no viable alternative. Federal funding for public media amounts to 0.012 percent of the total federal budget, but this modest investment provides value that can't be represented by a price tag.

Other funding options such as advertising would actually result in less money because people would refuse to voluntarily contribute to watch commercial advertising. On average, only 15 percent of a public broadcasting station's budget comes from the federal government, but this can be as high as 50 percent or more in rural or small-town America.

When asked if that amount should be reduced, increased or stay the same, 79 percent of Americans – including two-thirds of Republicans surveyed – supported maintaining or increasing funding. More than six in 10 voters who believe deficit reduction is an important goal also support funding for public broadcasting. And it is America's most trusted institution, according to a 2012 survey by Harris Interactive.

## THE HEART OF THE ISSUE

*The House voted to eliminate funding for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. Supporters say public TV and radio costs little but serves many.*

## CONTACT YOUR ELECTED OFFICIALS

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The Honorable (name), U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, DC 20515 • Phone: (202) 225-3121



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# VA steps up diabetes prevention efforts

BY BETH W. ORENSTEIN

A simple pedometer may help prevent Donnie Williams, 55, of Baltimore from developing diabetes.

Williams received a pedometer when he enrolled in VA's pilot program aimed at reducing the number of veterans with diabetes.

As many as one in four veterans in the VA health-care system has Type 2 diabetes, says Dr. Linda Kinsinger, VA's chief consultant for preventive medicine. The bodies of people with Type 2 diabetes make some insulin – a hormone produced by the pancreas that regulates the sugar level in blood – but it's not enough, or they just aren't able to use it properly. The body needs blood sugar for energy. Being sedentary and overweight or obese are among the risk factors for developing Type 2 diabetes.

A national research program known as the Diabetes Prevention Program (DPP), run by the National Institutes of Health, found that even modest weight loss through dietary changes and physical activity could prevent people with higher-than-normal blood-sugar levels from developing full-blown diabetes. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is promoting the DPP nationwide.

Patients who lost just 7 percent of their body weight – 14 pounds for someone weighing 200 pounds – were able to delay the onset of Type 2 diabetes. "When we monitored the DPP's results, we felt that it could be another tool to make a difference for our veterans, too," Kinsinger says.

**VA's pilot program** Last summer, VA implemented its pilot version of the DPP at three of its medical centers: Baltimore, Minneapolis and Los Angeles. "The goal is to have 120 participants in each of those three centers take part in the program," says Kenneth Jones, VA's national program director for weight management. "We anticipate it will take about a year to enroll everyone."

Williams went to the VA clinic in Baltimore last October for his regular checkup. Routine blood tests revealed that his blood sugar was higher than normal but not high enough to be diabetes.

See **DIABETES** on page 16



Media Bakery

## The five most common health supplements

ConsumerLab.com recently announced its findings on the five most commonly taken health supplements for various ailments.

**FISH OIL** For pain, inflammation, blood sugar and blood-pressure problems, and concentration

**CALCIUM** For osteoporosis risk, and possibly diabetes and blood-pressure problems

**VITAMIN D** For those who don't get enough sunlight (the natural source of vitamin D); potential benefits for immunity, backaches, diabetes risk, depression and cancer

**COQ1** For congestive heart failure, and possibly hypertension and those taking statin drugs

**PROBIOTICS** For digestion, immunity and infection resistance

Living Well is designed to provide general information. It is not intended to be, nor is it, medical advice. Readers should consult their physicians when they have health problems.

Media Bakery



**Jack Waldron**

Jack is a Colonel, US Army Reserve, and Commander, 206th Regional Support Group (RSG), Springfield, IL.

As a Senior Diabetes Care Specialist (Indianapolis, IN), he is on the front lines fighting diabetes, every day.

**Frank Couture**

Frank is a Lieutenant Commander, US Navy Reserve.

As a Diabetes Care Specialist (Portland, ME), he is committed to taking a stand against diabetes.

**Jared Patton**

Jared is a Tactical Intelligence Officer, 301st Military Intelligence Battalion, Phoenix, AZ. Currently a Captain, US Army Reserve.

As a Senior Diabetes Care Specialist (Scottsdale, AZ), he fights diabetes, today and every day.

**Scott White**

Scott is a Combat Medic, 75th Combat Support Hospital, Fort Gillem, GA. Currently a Specialist, US Army Reserve.

As a Senior Field Clinical Research Associate (Atlanta, GA), he puts his heart into every battle, especially the one against diabetes.

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**DIABETES** *continued from page 14*

Williams knows others – including his grandfather – who have had diabetes, and that it can cause blindness, nerve damage and kidney failure if not controlled. According to the CDC, diabetes is the seventh leading cause of death in the United States.

“When my doctor told me about the pilot program to prevent diabetes, I eagerly volunteered for it,” Williams says. He attended 16 weeks of classes, where he learned about the importance of making healthy food choices and exercising. He was also issued a pedometer and told to aim for a minimum of 1,500 steps (about three miles) a day.

An Army veteran, Williams took the instructions to heart. He couldn’t see himself walking around a track, so he decided he’d simply walk wherever he had to go, rather than ride. “If I have to go to the city, I leave early and walk rather than take the bus,” he says. “Instead of jumping in the car to go shopping, I walk.”

Williams made it his personal goal to log 2,000 to 2,500 steps most days, and his strategy seems to be working – though he didn’t walk as much as he would have liked during the brutally cold Baltimore winter. He has lost about 15 pounds, and reduced his risk of diabetes by getting his weight down to 184.

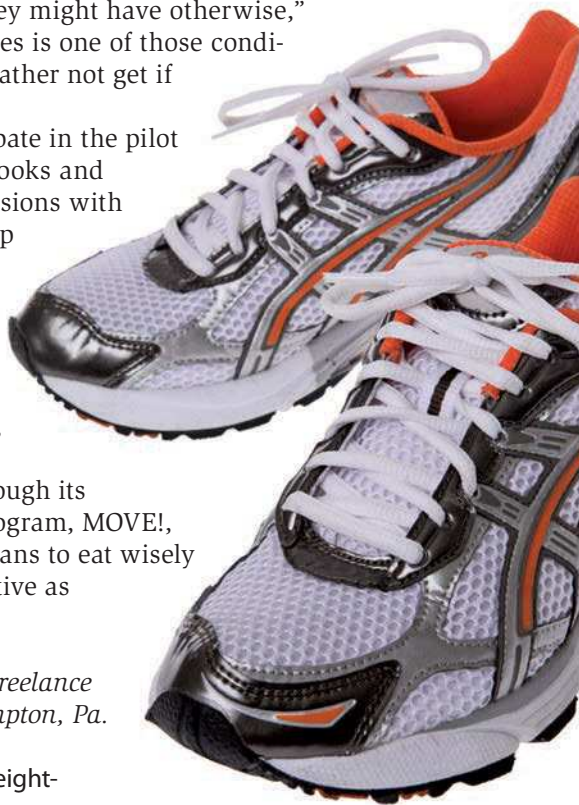
**Wake-up call** When people learn their blood sugar is elevated and that they are at increased risk for diabetes, they pay attention. “Once they’re told that, it does increase their motivation to take a few more steps than they might have otherwise,” Kinsinger says. “Diabetes is one of those conditions that folks would rather not get if they can avoid it.”

Veterans who participate in the pilot program receive workbooks and participate in group sessions with health coaches who help them set appropriate weight-loss and exercise goals.

Though the pilot program is currently limited to three centers, VA provides diabetes-prevention services through its weight-management program, MOVE!, which encourages veterans to eat wisely and be as physically active as possible.

*Beth W. Orenstein is a freelance writer living in Northampton, Pa.*

Learn more about VA’s weight-prevention program online:  
**[www.move.va.gov](http://www.move.va.gov)**



Media Bakery



## Dental therapists seen as solution where care scant

Left unchecked, oral health problems can have dire consequences, even landing people in the emergency room – an expensive proposition.

Heading off those problems with regular treatment is vital. But the Pew Center on the States says that more than 40 million Americans live in areas short on dental professionals. One idea to address the problem is adding a new rung on the professional ladder: the dental therapist, who doesn’t have all the training a dentist receives but can do some basic tasks, such as treating cavities and pulling teeth. Dental therapists can travel to care-starved areas, and can accept Medicaid and Medicare as well as other kinds of insurance.

So far, only Alaska and Minnesota have approved the use of dental therapists, but at least 10 more state legislatures are considering bills authorizing it. The American Dental Association (ADA), which argues that public access problems are not a question of numbers but of distribution, is working on ways to deliver dental care in non-urban environments.

ADA is reportedly rolling out several new prevention and care programs as state legislators consider new dental therapy programs, citing aging populations and the success of midlevel nurse practitioner positions for other health-care services.



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## 'Bac' to basics

As WebMD reports, "a recent study found that staff in long-term care facilities who relied too much on hand sanitizers over hand washing actually reported more outbreaks of norovirus-related illness." In other words, while alcohol-based hand sanitizers are useful in fighting off some bacteria and viruses, they "are not a substitute for washing with soap and water," the CDC advises.

Still, Dr. Aaron E. Glatt, executive vice president of Mercy Medical Center on Long Island, N.Y., and spokesman for the Infectious Diseases Society of America, recommends that people use antibacterial hand sanitizers, especially when soap and water are not available.

The bottom line is that both soap and water and alcohol-based sanitizers can play a role in keeping you healthy, WebMD concludes. Hand sanitizers should supplement – not replace – soap and water.



Media Bakery

## How to avoid falls

Carolyn Clancy of the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality reports that "more than one-third of adults over 65 fall each year." And about one-third of those who fall "suffer moderate to serious injuries, including hip fractures and head trauma." These injuries often lead to a number of health problems. So the key is to avoid falls in the first place by keeping fall-contributing factors in mind.

These factors include increased use of medicines that might cause dizziness or slow reaction time, the layout of homes, and declining vision, balance and strength. To mitigate these risks, Clancy recommends the following steps:

### Know your medicines

"Make sure your doctor knows which medicines you take," she says. Keep a current list of all the medicines you take. And make sure your list and your doctor's list match. This will help the doctor identify possible interaction issues, especially whether some drugs might contribute to dizziness or imbalance.



### Stay strong with exercise

Exercise can help promote balance and coordination. "But keep in mind that it takes time to build and regain strength," Clancy says.



### Create a safe environment

Home assessments can "help determine the safety of your home and identify ways to make it safer. Suggestions may include installing grab bars in the bathtub and making sure rugs are securely fastened. Area Agencies on Aging can provide information and referrals to local home modification programs," Clancy says.



## Diet mixers make liquor work quicker

A study published in the April edition of *Alcoholism: Clinical & Experimental Research* finds that people who mix alcohol with diet drinks have a higher breath alcohol content than those who mix it with non-diet drinks, appearing to get drunk faster. Sugar slows the absorption of alcohol into the bloodstream; the less sugar in the mixer, the quicker the alcohol is released.



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of Veterans Affairs

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U.S. Army, U.S. Army Reserve  
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# VA promises to bring wait times under control

BY TOM PHILPOTT

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is promising to correct long-standing weaknesses in the medical appointment processes that have frustrated veterans wanting timely care and auditors seeking reliable data on wait times for outpatient care at VA hospitals and clinics.

The reforms, which the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) plans to implement over the next year, will reportedly adopt a more valid method of measuring patient wait times and a clearer scheduling policy for VA facilities to follow.

These details did not generate enthusiasm at a hearing of the House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, where the Government Accountability Office (GAO) presented new findings that some VA facilities manipulate data on patient appointments to make it appear that veterans get more timely access to care than they do.

"The bottom line is that it is unclear how long veterans are waiting to receive care in VA medical facilities because the reported data are unreliable," Debra A. Draper, GAO's director of health care, told the panel.

The American Legion compiled an appendix of stories from disappointed veterans denied timely care. Roscoe Butler, national field service representative on the Legion's Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Division staff, urged the subcommittee to read the accounts for a truer picture of wait times and the hurdles veterans face to get access to care.

"Whether it's frustration with repeatedly being put on hold, waiting three-quarters of a year for a basic primary-care appointment or being forced repeatedly to adjust to new primary-care providers, the needs of veterans are not being met," Butler said.

A decade of the Legion's System Worth Saving visits show that most veterans "love the care they receive when they can get it," Butler said. The frustration is with access. The waits, he suggested, could be partially solved by extending health-care service hours, especially for mental health.

In January, VA directed health facilities treating more than 10,000 veterans a year to extend service

time by a total of four hours a week. That's not enough, Butler said. And besides extending treatment hours, he cautioned, VA needs to modernize its appointment scheduling system.

"After nearly a decade of indecision between off-the-shelf software and in-house designs, the entire project was dropped in late 2009," Butler said. There is still no fix in place, although VA is seeking fresh bids from contractors.

VA lead witness William Schoenhard, VHA's deputy undersecretary for health operations and management, said VHA is acting on GAO recommendations to improve reliability of wait-time measures, ensure that medical centers implement scheduling policy consistently, require routine reassessments of scheduling needs and improve phone access for arranging care.

GAO had audited VA scheduling staffs and found that they do not always correctly record "desired dates," which are dates veterans and providers agree should be the next appointment. GAO blamed lack of clarity in scheduling policy

and poor training, made worse by the number of staff members who can schedule appointments – more than 50,000 across the system.

What upset the subcommittee more was GAO's finding that some staff admitted changing medical appointment data so that wait times aligned with performance goals. One scheduler at a primary care clinic, Draper said, stated that dates were changed on the books "to show that there were no long wait times." At a specialty care clinic, providers changed dates to make data fall within VA's required 14-day timeline, Draper said.

No scheduler told GAO that false data "were directed by management," Draper said. But the situation allowed ample opportunity, intentional or not, to show results facilities "want to achieve."

Pressed for his reaction, Schoenhard said that "gaming" of data, if that's what GAO found, "is entirely unacceptable ... And when that is visible to us we will take appropriate action."

*Tom Philpott has written about veterans and military personnel issues for more than 30 years.*



Veer



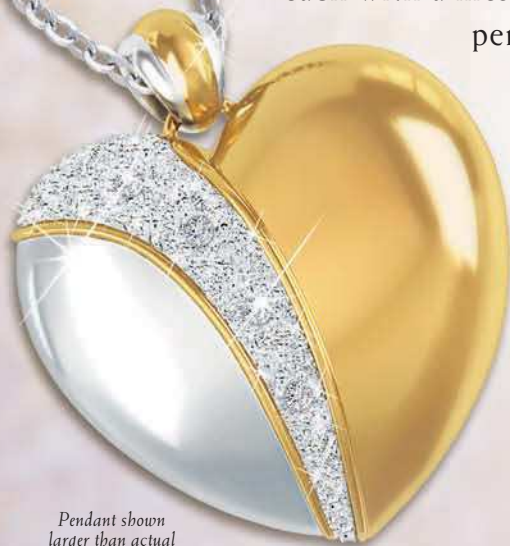
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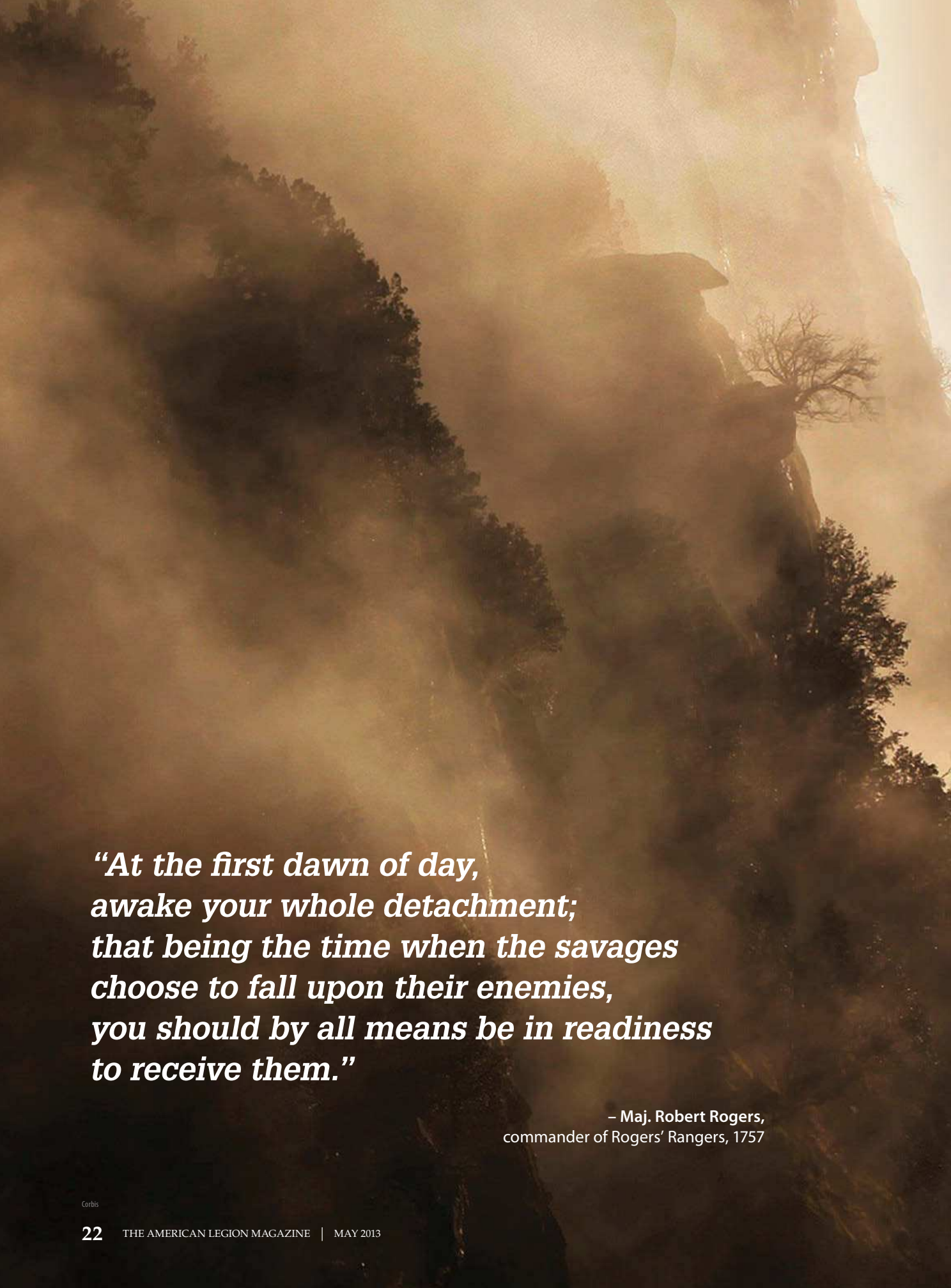
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that being the time when the savages  
choose to fall upon their enemies,  
you should by all means be in readiness  
to receive them.”***

**– Maj. Robert Rogers,  
commander of Rogers’ Rangers, 1757**



# THE BATTLE FOR COP KEATING

BY MARK SEAVEY

It was dawn on Oct. 3, 2009, when nearly 350 Taliban-led insurgents attacked U.S. Army Combat Outpost (COP) Keating in the Kamdesh Valley of Afghanistan. Built on low ground in a river valley, the COP was home to fewer than 60 cavalymen from Bravo Troop, 3rd Squadron, 61st Cavalry Regiment of the 4th Infantry Division. They would confront the enemy in a 12-hour close-contact battle that nearly became hand-to-hand combat. Outpost security would be breached in three places. Fires set by the attackers would destroy the COP's barracks. Close air support and mortar fire had to be directed at enemy forces inside the original security perimeter.

The battle for COP Keating has come to illustrate the war in Afghanistan, where the mission is often as misunderstood by the American public as the remote corner of the planet where it's occurred. Along with the Battle of Wanat, COP Keating is a signature conflict of the war. And with the publication of CNN Chief Washington Correspondent Jake Tapper's new book, "The Outpost: An Untold Story of American Valor," it may soon become the war's best-known battle.

The Battle for COP Keating produced a constellation of medals: 27 Purple Hearts, 37 Army Commendation Medals with "V" devices for valor, three Bronze Stars, 18 Bronze Stars with "V" devices, and nine Silver Stars. Staff Sgt. Clinton "Clint" Romesha recently received the Medal of Honor for his actions that day, and another soldier, Sgt. Ty Carter, has been recommended for one.

The enemy death toll is estimated at between 150 and 200. Eight U.S. soldiers paid the ultimate price that day: Justin T. Gallegos of Tucson, Ariz.; Christopher Griffin of Kincheloe, Mich.; Kevin C. Thomson of Reno, Nev.; Michael P. Scusa of Villas, N.J.; Vernon W. Martin of

Savannah, Ga.; Stephan L. Mace of Lovettsville, Va.; Joshua J. Kirk of South Portland, Maine; and Joshua M. Hardt of Applegate, Calif.

A Paid-Up-For-Life member of The American Legion Department of North Dakota, Romesha's humility seems a stark contrast to his Medal of Honor. "It's all a team effort," he says. "You do what you do, and that is what will speak for you."

One man who works with Romesha in the North Dakota oil fields says the young veteran talks little about his role in the war. "We knew he'd been a soldier, but up until the announcement came from the White House, we had no idea to what degree," the co-worker says. "It didn't surprise us so much that he was capable of it. We were just surprised we hadn't heard about it before."

The former staff sergeant's humble nature was on full display during a press conference at the White House on Feb. 11, following a ceremony in which President Obama awarded Romesha the medal. "I don't think I'm much different than Medal of Honor recipients Sgt. 1st Class (Leroy) Petry and former Staff Sgt. (Sal) Giunta in feeling conflicted with this medal I now wear," Romesha says. "The joy comes from recognition for us doing our jobs as soldiers on distant battlefields but is countered by the constant reminder of the loss of our battle buddies. My battle buddies. My soldiers. My friends."

According to his Medal of Honor citation and interviews with his comrades, Romesha was usually in the middle of wherever the battle for COP Keating was thickest. With enemy fighters occupying the high ground on all four sides of the COP, he moved, uncovered and, under intense enemy fire, conducted a reconnaissance of the battlefield and sought reinforcements from the barracks before returning to action with the support of an assistant gunner. He took out an enemy machine-gun team and, while engaging a second, the generator he was using for cover was struck by a rocket-propelled grenade, peppering him with shrapnel wounds. Undeterred, Romesha continued to fight, and upon the arrival of another

See **BATTLE** on page 26

## INTERVIEW

# JAKE TAPPER

*Jake Tapper is the chief Washington correspondent and anchor of the CNN television news show "The Lead with Jake Tapper." Prior to working with CNN, he was the senior White House correspondent for ABC News. His new book, "The Outpost: An Untold Story of American Valor," chronicles the history of Combat Outpost Keating.*

### **What was it about the assault on COP Keating that led you to write "The Outpost"?**

A couple of things. One was my dissatisfaction with my own coverage of the war in Afghanistan as a White House reporter. I had been covering it from the comfort of the North Lawn, discussing tensions between the president and the Pentagon and battling about troop levels – 20,000, 40,000 – that seemed meaningless in many ways.

Then on Oct. 3, 2009, I was in the recovery room of a hospital with my wife and 1-day-old son, Jack, when out of the corner of my eye I caught a TV report about this attack on a remote outpost in Afghanistan. I'd never heard of Combat Outpost Keating, but its location at the bottom of three steep mountains just 14 miles from the Pakistani border didn't make much sense to me, and the 53 U.S. troops there surrounded by up to 400 Taliban sounded terrifying. Standing there

holding my son, I heard about eight other sons taken from this earth – eight U.S. troops killed in the outpost. I wanted to know more about why they were there, who they were, what they went through. The book grew from there.

### **In the book, you detail hundreds of acts of heroism not just on that day, but all through these soldiers' deployments. Is there one thing that stands out that exemplifies the heroism of this unit?**

The book starts in March 2006, as 3-71 Cav pushes north to set up these tiny outposts throughout (Regional Command East), and as you note, there are acts of valor and heroism from the beginning. So many stand out to me, including those leaders and commanders who put themselves in danger to be near their men, such as Lt. Col. Joseph Fenty, or those who took action so others wouldn't have to take a risk, like Lt. Ben Keating, or those who ran out into danger to try to help a fallen brother, such as Spc. Jared Monti or (Afghan National Army) trainer Sgt. Buddy Hughie.

What stands out most about the attack is that each one of the eight killed that day died doing something heroic – whether returning fire, running into fire to provide ammunition to someone on guard duty, or trying to help a brother in danger. Every one of them died selflessly.

## BOOK EXCERPT

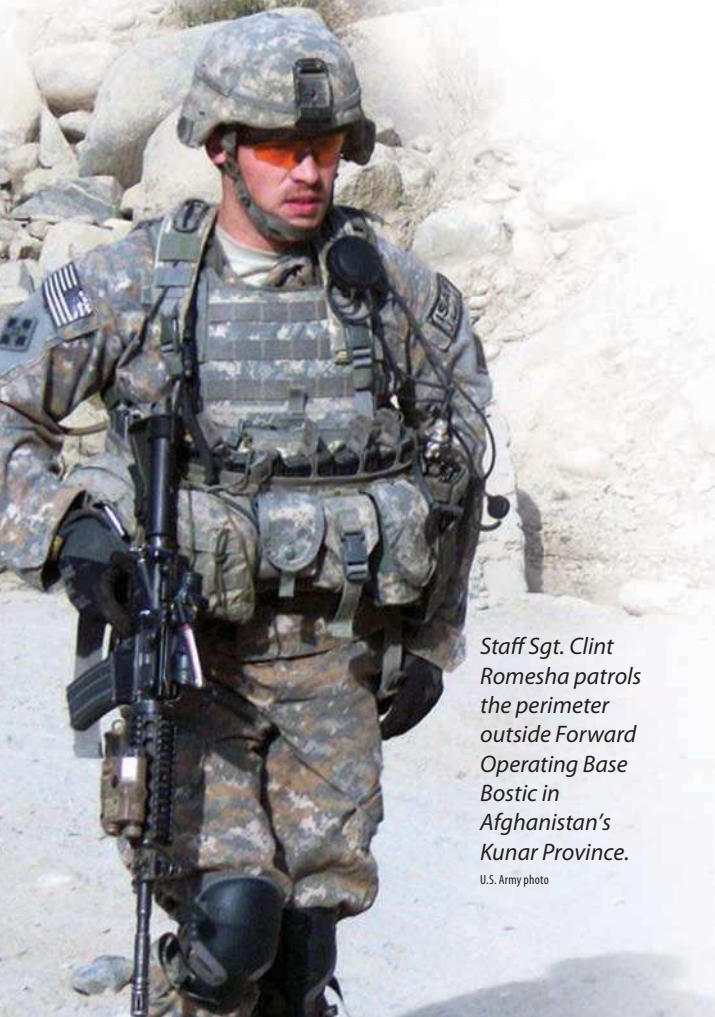
# THE OUTPOST

Outside the Red Platoon barracks, Clint Romesha yanked Cpl. Justin Gregory's Mk 48 machine gun out of his hands. "Grab more ammo and follow me," he told him.

"I'm moving a machine gun into position to cover you," Romesha radioed Gallegos, who was stuck at LRAS-2 (a Humvee equipped with a Long-Range Advance Scout Surveillance System). "As soon as I can cover you, if you can, I need you all to displace back to Red Platoon barracks."

"I don't know if you can lay down enough fire," Gallegos said, "but if you can, roger." Inside the Humvee, it seemed as if they were being submerged in an ocean of bullets and grenades: Gallegos, Mace and Larson could only hope the trunk's plating would hold up against the relentless battering. And however determined and skilled and ruthless a soldier Romesha might be, that he alone could provide enough cover fire with one lightweight machine gun seemed unlikely.

Romesha and Gregory scurried over to the generator by the mosque. There, Romesha set the machine gun atop the generator, and Gregory began linking up its ammunition. "I'm setting the machine gun to fire whenever you're ready to move," Romesha radioed to Gallegos.



*Staff Sgt. Clint Romesha patrols the perimeter outside Forward Operating Base Bostic in Afghanistan's Kunar Province.*

U.S. Army photo



**You visited several wounded warrior facilities while promoting your book. What observations have you made about the way America treats military personnel recovering from wounds and illnesses?**

I just returned from the Warrior and Family Support Center in San Antonio. There are some unbelievable people trying to help our troops transition. What seems clear is that we as a nation are not sufficiently committed to helping these brave souls and their family members, particularly with their mental wounds – the TBI and PTSD that is remarkably prevalent.

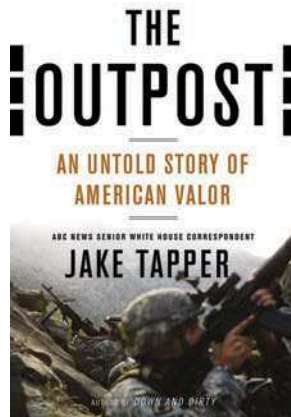
That's one of the reasons I included a chapter in the book focused on Pvt. Ed Faulkner Jr., who'd been awarded Purple Hearts in Iraq and Afghanistan only to overdose in a bed in North Carolina less than a year after the Oct. 3, 2009, attack. The Army turned its back on Ed, and VA was not engaged or involved enough. What happened to him was not just a tragedy – it was an indictment of how we treat our soldiers who have deep psychological wounds.

**As a civilian who usually deals with political issues, why were you so drawn to this story?**

It became apparent that you could trace deaths and disasters involving our troops in Afghanistan directly back to decisions made by generals and civilians in Washington. At the same time, there is such a disconnect between our leaders and the boots on the ground there. It's bizarre.

**As ABC News' White House correspondent, you saw things more often from the Washington perspective. Do you think there is an appreciation in the government for the difficulties faced by U.S. troops stationed at the "tip of the spear"?**

It depends on how one defines "appreciation." Are there folks willing to emote and speak movingly about our fighting men and women? Sure. We don't lack for people wearing flag pins here. But are they willing to commit to our troops what they need to fight and survive, and what they and their families need back here at home? Those qualities are all too lacking.



Originally called "Kamdesht PRT" after the remote region of Afghanistan where it was located, the outpost was renamed after Able Troop, 3-71 Cavalry, 10th Mountain Division's executive officer, Benjamin Keating, lost his life Nov. 26, 2006, during combat operations south of the camp.

"Roger," Gallegos responded.

Romesha looked around at the myriad targets up at the Putting Green and throughout the Switchbacks. There were so many to choose from. He picked one enemy position and sent a 20-to-30-round burst toward it. Then he moved to another. Then another. He quickly ran through the 200-round belt.

While Gregory was loading another belt into the gun, Gallegos radioed. "We're not able to move," he said. "We're not able to move." The incoming fire was just too intense, coming from too many different locations.

Romesha had started firing the second belt when, from the blind side to his right, to the north of the camp, an insurgent burst through the entry control point and fired an RPG toward him and Gregory, hitting the generator instead. Romesha, sprayed with shrapnel, momentarily lost his bearings and fell on Gregory. The moment over, he got up and looked at him. "You all right?" he asked.

"Yes," Gregory said.

"Go back to the barracks, I'll cover you," Romesha instructed. He covered the other's mad dash and then began firing into the hills again.

Gallegos came on the radio again. "You're not being

effective, it's not working," he told Romesha. "We'll just hang tight here."

Romesha exhaled, fired his last burst of ammo, and ran back down the hill. He found Gregory in a trench near a HESCO barrier, on the southern side of the camp near the Switchbacks. "Wait here, I'm going to get more guys,"

Romesha told him, handing him back his machine gun. He ran back to the Red Platoon barracks, where he told Christopher Jones and Spc. Josh Dannelley to go help Gregory. Rasmussen looked at Romesha.

"Ro, dude," he said. "You're f\*\*\*ing hit. You're f\*\*\*ing hit."

Romesha looked down. His right forearm was a bloody mess. "Let me dress that," Rasmussen said, pulling Romesha's pressure dressing from his pocket and wrapping his friend's forearm tightly with the specialized bandage ...

■ ■ ■

Less than an hour into their assault on Combat Outpost Keating, insurgents had breached the camp's perimeter. They were coming from the southern wall, near the maintenance shed; they were coming from the ANA (Afghan National Army) side of the outpost; they were even walking through the front entrance.

***Romesha exhaled, fired his last burst of ammo and ran back down the hill.***



Members of Red Platoon, 61st Cavalry Regiment, including Staff Sgt. Clint Romesha (far left), following the battle for Combat Outpost Keating. Photo courtesy Armando Avalos

## BATTLE continued from page 23

soldier to aid him and the assistant gunner, he again rushed through the exposed avenue to assemble additional soldiers.

Romesha mobilized a five-man team and returned to the fight equipped with a Russian sniper rifle left behind by one of the wounded Afghan National Army (ANA) soldiers. “With complete disregard for his own safety, Staff Sgt. Romesha continually exposed himself to heavy enemy fire, as he moved confidently about the battlefield engaging and destroying multiple enemy targets, including three Taliban fighters who had breached the combat outpost’s perimeter.”

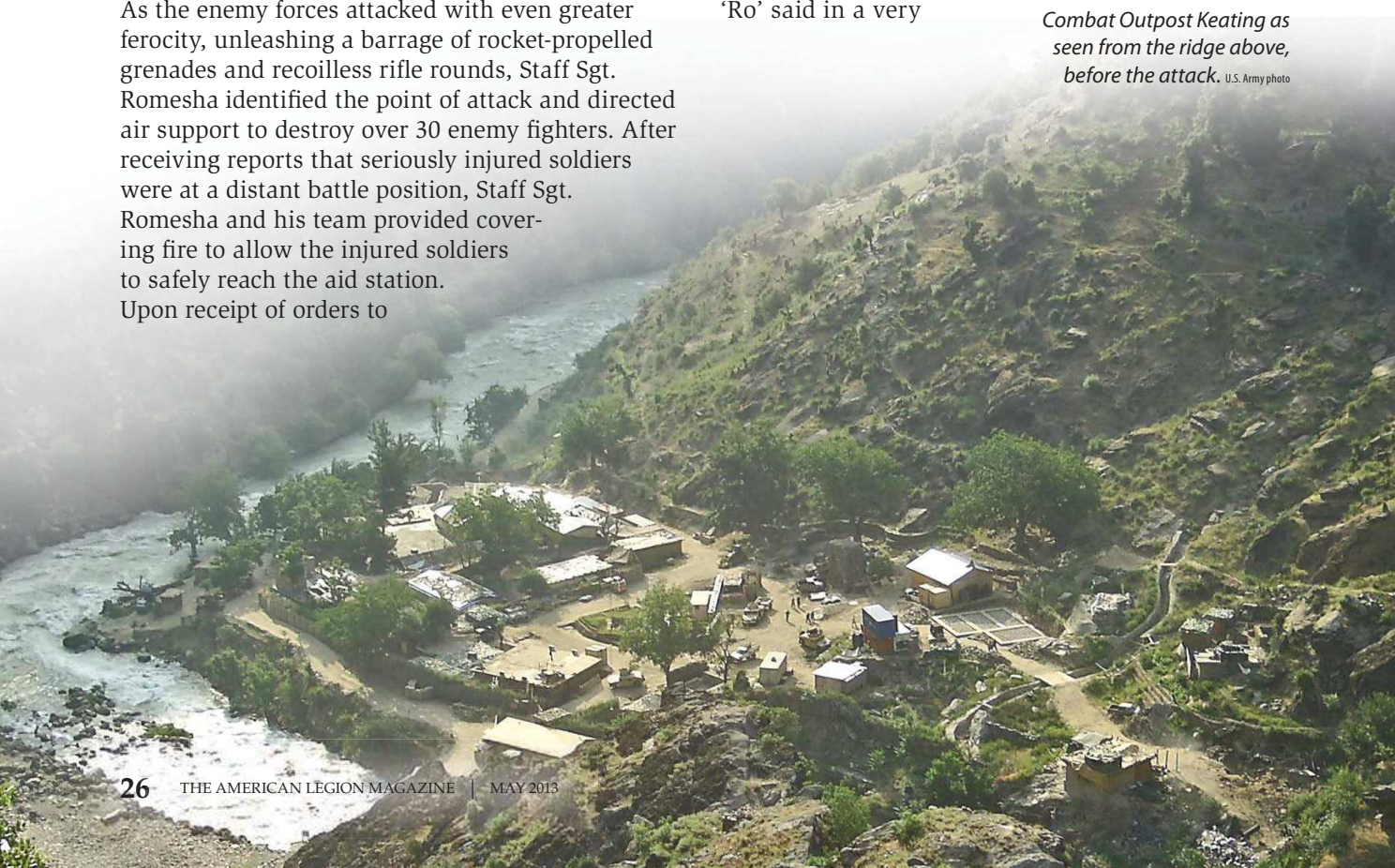
The citation continues: “While orchestrating a successful plan to secure and reinforce key points of the battlefield, Staff Sgt. Romesha maintained radio communication with the tactical operations center. As the enemy forces attacked with even greater ferocity, unleashing a barrage of rocket-propelled grenades and recoilless rifle rounds, Staff Sgt. Romesha identified the point of attack and directed air support to destroy over 30 enemy fighters. After receiving reports that seriously injured soldiers were at a distant battle position, Staff Sgt. Romesha and his team provided covering fire to allow the injured soldiers to safely reach the aid station. Upon receipt of orders to

proceed to the next objective, his team pushed forward 100 meters under overwhelming enemy fire to recover and prevent the enemy fighters from taking the bodies of the fallen comrades. Staff Sgt. Romesha’s heroic actions throughout the day-long battle were critical in suppressing an enemy that had far greater numbers.”

Romesha’s heroism didn’t surprise his commanding officer, Stoney Portis of Hanover, N.H. “His soldiers respected him because he never asked them to do anything he wouldn’t, or couldn’t, do himself,” Portis says. “In a firefight, he could orient fires and fire teams while simultaneously integrating indirect fires. But Clint was tough on his leaders, too. There were times when he would ask his platoon leader or me, ‘Sir, would you mind explaining that to me? Have you thought about doing it this way instead?’ When he offered an alternative, his leaders listened, and to no one’s surprise, his plans improved our missions.”

Jon Hill, a platoon sergeant and recipient of a Silver Star, said he’ll never forget Romesha’s attitude that day. “I was at my peak of frustration, fatigue, and overwhelmed at the situation at hand,” Hill says. “Needless to say, there was a lot going on at one time. In the tactical operations center, it was loud with explosions just outside, yelling, and new reports of enemy locations. Out of the blue, ‘Ro’ said in a very

*Combat Outpost Keating as seen from the ridge above, before the attack.* U.S. Army photo







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## Legion response to embattled soldiers: 'We give a sh\*t'

When the troopers of B 3-61 left COP Keating for the last time in October 2009, most had only the clothes on their backs and their weapons in hand.

Insurgents who breached the outpost wall had set fire to several barracks, destroying everything inside. As the fighting progressed, the unit was forced to call in close air support and mortar fire on their own buildings to stop enemy forces inside the perimeter.

One young cavalry trooper, anguished and grieving the loss of eight friends, wrote home in an email, "Most people back home don't even know ... no one gives a sh\*t."

His email was forwarded to American Legion National Headquarters, where it was publicized on the Legion's Burn Pit blog. Legionnaires quickly responded by creating the COP Keating Relief Fund, which had an initial goal of raising enough money to show the soldiers that someone – specifically the Legion – cared. The goal was set at \$5,000.

Legionnaires, veterans, active-duty troops and civilians made donations ranging from \$5 to hundreds of dollars. Within 48 hours, the goal had been reached and doubled. Contributions continued to pour in, as did photos of Legionnaires – men and women, old and young – holding up signs at their posts declaring, "We Give a Sh\*t."

By the time the drive ended, the Legion family and others had collected or raised more than \$200,000 and received donations of goods from companies such as Target Corp. and Computer Sciences Corp. of Connecticut, which provided a refurbished computer for each of the soldiers. The Legion also purchased videos, food, iPods, cameras, video games and other morale-building items from Target stores in Colorado, Minnesota and Virginia.

"B Troop owes an enormous debt of gratitude to the great Americans who provided hundreds of care packages and support after the attack on COP Keating," said Bravo Troop commander Stoney Portis in a 2009 email to The American Legion. "I remember thinking to myself: 'The Army has systems to replace mission-essential gear like weapon systems and uniforms, but how do you replace the sentiments of home while deployed to the mountains of Afghanistan? We need to do something for morale.' Fortunately, we were blessed with extraordinarily resourceful leaders within the brigade and squadron. And as for morale, that's where folks like the supporters from The American Legion and elsewhere came in."



stern and demanding voice – just as there was a moment of odd but haunting silence – 'I'll tell you what we are going to do. We are going to take this f\*\*\*ing COP back!' When he said that, and the way he said it, it was like his war cry trying to rally the men for that last bit of guts, honor and never-quit attitude."

And take it back they did. Twelve hours after the battle started, the quick-reaction force that had landed three kilometers away made it to the COP and relieved the besieged troops.

After the battle, COP Keating was abandoned, and ultimately destroyed by U.S. aircraft called in to ensure that nothing was left that could be used by the insurgents. As the last helicopters full of troops loaded up to leave the area, Romesha was the final man on the bird.

"It was bittersweet leaving COP Keating," Romesha says. "Units before us suffered there, and we suffered there, and to give up that terrain was a little heartbreaking. But tactical decisions above us are made, and we've got our job to do."

Romesha is now separated from the military and enjoying time with his family. "Tammi (his wife) and the kids have been back state-side keeping down the homefront for so long and sacrificing so much with me being over there doing what I was doing," he says. "I loved being an NCO, and I loved being overseas and training and leading soldiers, but it was just time to come home and be the dad and husband they deserved."

Still, he's not done fighting and advocating for his fellow veterans. And as the son of a Vietnam War veteran, Romesha appreciates everything that generation has done to ease the transition for his generation, and to ensure that they weren't mistreated.

"The support of the American public has always been (at the) forefront in my mind," he says. "I always reflect back to the Vietnam War vets who never got their welcome home, and I try to remember and honor those guys."

"I want to thank the guys who are still serving today," he adds. "And I can't thank the American people and the spouses they left behind enough. They serve, too, when we are overseas." 🌿

*Mark Seavey is a writer for The American Legion Magazine Division and editor of the Legion's Burn Pit blog site.*



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# WE

# REMEMBER

*American Legion unveils new web page dedicated to documenting the sacrifice and heroism of our veterans and those serving today.*

A soldier receives a commendation for selfless bravery in battle. An honor guard member presents the U.S. flag to a grieving wife. A family tree boasts generations of military service.

Such acts, such traditions, are about honor and remembrance – about preserving “the memories and incidents of our associations in the Great Wars,” in the words of the Preamble to The American Legion Constitution. To that end, the Legion is launching a special web page of stories, photos and videos illustrating veterans’ courage and sacrifice: **[www.legion.org/honor](http://www.legion.org/honor)**.

The page is also a rich resource, offering a searchable directory of museums, memorials and cemeteries; information on how to obtain medals and citations; and an opportunity to tell your family’s story of military service.

## EXPLORE SACRED PLACES

We’ve posted the names and addresses of more than 1,200 museums, memorials, monuments and cemeteries honoring America’s military and veterans, and are adding more daily. The database, searchable by state and category, also offers directions to the sites. Know of a site that isn’t listed? Tell us in an email.

✉ **[honor@legion.org](mailto:honor@legion.org)**



## READ STORIES OF HONOR

Did you know that an 87-year-old Legionnaire is still serving with his post’s honor guard? Or that Fort Jackson in South Carolina has a museum (pictured above) that traces a recruit’s basic training, from haircut to graduation? Read these stories and others.

## MORE HONOR AND REMEMBRANCE

In addition to the new web page, The American Legion may publish a monthly e-newsletter featuring stories about honor and remembrance. Let us know if you are interested by voting in our poll. 🗳 **[www.legion.org/honor](http://www.legion.org/honor)**

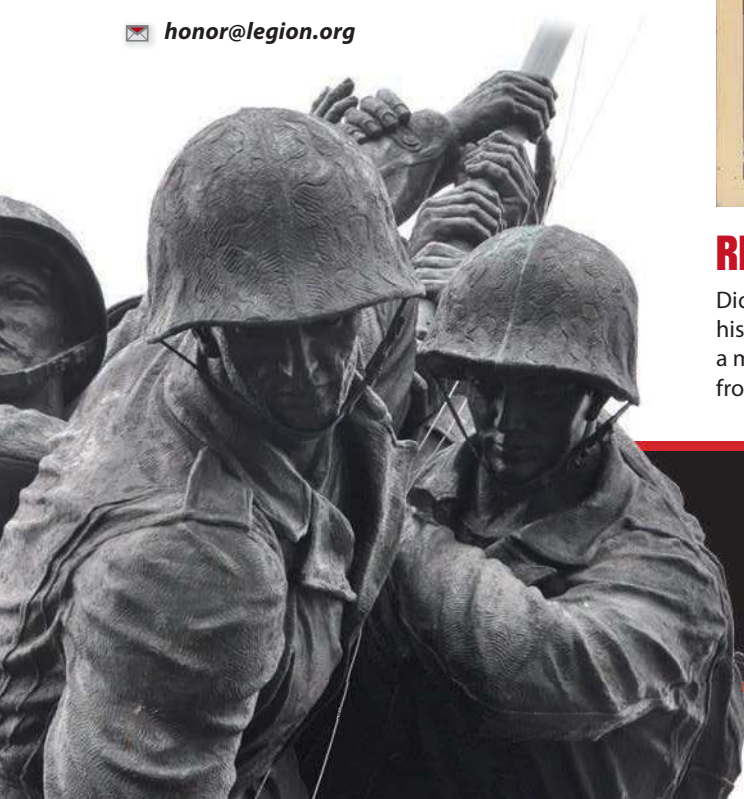






Photo by  
Eldon Lindsay



Photo by Eldon Lindsay

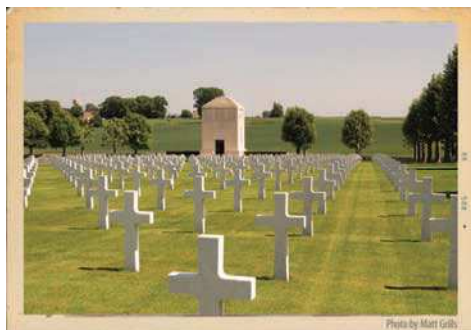


Photo by Matt Gellis

## VISIT OUR GALLERIES

It may not be possible to visit every site that honors America's veterans and the wars they fought. But you can take a virtual tour through our photo galleries, which include memorials and museums across the United States, the hallowed grounds of Arlington, and U.S. cemeteries in Europe.

## SHARE YOUR TRIBUTES

The American Legion is committed to honoring those who have passed on. Families are encouraged to submit veterans' obituaries by going to [www.legion.org/honor](http://www.legion.org/honor) and clicking on "In Memoriam" at the top of the page. Once you enter the late veteran's name and obituary and upload a photo (optional), just hit the "Save" button. There is no charge.

## WRITE YOUR CHAPTER OF OUR STORY

You are proud of your family's connection to military service. Or perhaps your post has a museum or special event devoted to honoring and remembering those who served and sacrificed for this nation. We want to help share those stories. Here's a brief example of one family's military and American Legion legacy:

*"My grandfather, Richard Paige, served in the Navy during the Korean War and has been a member of The American Legion ever since. My younger brother, Scott, is in the Army and currently in Afghanistan. Scott and I are members of Post 107 in Soddy-Daisy. I was a delegate to Boys State in 2002, and I graduated from West Point and deployed to Iraq in 2008. I will take my first command this spring at Fort Bragg, N.C."*

— Capt. Kevin Beavers, Chattanooga, Tenn.

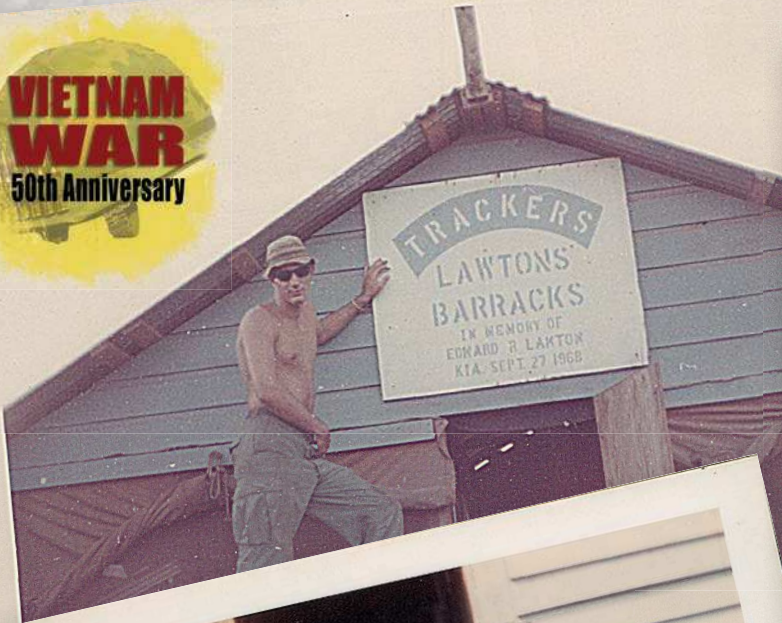


### How to submit your story

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WAR**  
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Photos courtesy David Herbert





# VIETNAM'S COMBAT TRACKERS

**They chased an elusive enemy into the jungles. They gathered intelligence. They retrieved missing U.S. soldiers and pilots. Once one of the war's best-kept secrets, these elite Army teams are proud of their legacy.**

**BY KEN OLSEN**

**P**ete Peterson was recruited for the combat trackers while recovering at a U.S. military hospital in Japan during the fall of 1968. It wasn't a hard sell for the two trackers who shared his hospital ward. Peterson had lost several friends in a firefight with the North Vietnamese while he was sidelined with an ankle injury. "The tracker's job was to hunt down the enemy," says Peterson, who had been serving with an infantry company. "I liked the idea of that. I wanted some payback."

When he returned to Vietnam, Peterson joined one of the elite Army teams charged with finding an enemy known for melting into the jungle, gathering intelligence, and searching for missing U.S. soldiers and pilots. Although the secrecy surrounding the combat trackers has meant their accomplishments were all but lost to history, they were so successful that the North Vietnamese army put a bounty on the five-man teams and their Labrador retrievers. That bounty was a point of pride with the trackers, part of what made the work both arduous and gratifying.

"It was easier than being in a line company, plowing through the jungle, waiting for something to happen," Peterson says. "At least with the trackers, you knew something could very well happen. It kept you on your toes."

But that constant tension was also exhausting. "We were busier than any other infantry operation," says Perry Taitano, who was a dog handler with Peterson's team. "We were always on the front line."

## **“Probably half the NCOs flunked out ... they couldn’t take it.”**

Peterson learned the tracking trade on the job – but that was the exception. The British military secretly trained the first wave of U.S. tracker teams deployed in Vietnam. The U.S. Army later established its own training school at Fort Gordon, Ga.

The British had developed jungle-savvy combat tracker teams to deal with communist insurgents in Malaysia in the 1950s. Each included a visual tracker, a dog handler and Labrador retriever, a cover man, a radioman and a team leader. Their success depended on an ability to move quickly and avoid detection. That often meant running for miles to catch the enemy and maintain the element of surprise.

“The British had figured out how to out-guerrilla the guerrillas,” says Susan Merritt, wife of combat tracker Frank Merritt, and author of “Seek On!”, a history of U.S. combat trackers in Vietnam.

The Army contracted with the New Zealand Special Air Service (SAS) to train American trackers, and with the British to supply tracking dogs, beginning in 1966. Soldiers were shipped to British Jungle Warfare School in Malaysia for an intensive eight-week field course. They traveled from Vietnam to Malaysia in civilian clothes on temporary U.S. State Department passports – all part of the secrecy that surrounded the program.

Dog handlers were paired up with a dog and trained separately for most of the course. The other soldiers learned visual tracking, no matter what role they would assume once the team was in combat. The two groups came together for their final two weeks in Malaysia.

The school was brutal. Each trainee had to run up a hill with someone on his back, then kick a latrine hard enough for the SAS instructors to hear it. “That latrine was made of ribbed metal, and you could hear it for miles, yet the instructors would always say, ‘I did not hear you hit it,’ and you found yourself running up the hill again,” says Charles Steward, who went through the school in 1968. Soldiers, working in groups of six, were also required to run through a field carrying a telephone pole. And that was only part of the endurance test.

“The philosophy was if you weren’t physically fit, you couldn’t follow that dog through the jungle,” Steward says. “Probably half the NCOs flunked out and went back to Vietnam. They couldn’t take it.” Trainees also washed out if they didn’t quickly learn visual tracking. Overall, 12 of

the 40 men Steward went to Malaysia with failed.

That rigorous preparation paid off. “We were probably the best-trained U.S. Army soldiers in the field at the time,” says John Dupla, who trained in Malaysia in 1967. “We knew what we were doing and we had the confidence to do it.”

## **“The jungle belonged to them.”**

Tracking teams were assigned to combat divisions and brigades but were dispatched wherever they were needed. Combat trackers were summoned when U.S. forces were ambushed or engaged and then lost contact with the enemy.

The teams traveled by helicopter and were often greeted by hostile gunfire. “From the time the helicopter started to land, I was waiting for a bullet to hit me,” says cover man David Herbert, who, ironically, was dispatched to tracker training after washing out of NCO school. “We didn’t wear flak jackets or steel pots. They were too heavy and hindered you more than helped you.”

Unlike scout dogs and their handlers, combat tracker teams worked well ahead of infantry units. The visual tracker or the dog and handler led the team, depending on tracking conditions and whether there was clear evidence – such as a trail of blood – indicating the direction the enemy had gone. The cover man was always second in line, protecting whoever was leading the team. “If you got into something, you shot your way out,” Herbert says. “The level of constant stress was unreal. I walked out after one firefight, and I couldn’t feel my feet touch the ground.”

Ideally, the tracker team located the enemy and then called the regular troops. “If things worked out OK, the dog alerted, we stopped, called the infantry forward, they re-engaged and the fight was on,” Steward says. “More times than not, we would take a few rounds before the infantry got up there. Fortunately, my team never lost anybody. A lot of times we got lucky. Very lucky.”

Although records are incomplete, it appears that 43 of the approximately 750 combat trackers deployed in Vietnam were killed in action, Susan Merritt says. That casualty rate would have been much higher if not for their superior training. “The jungle,” she says, “belonged to them.”

The trackers also credit the dogs for repeatedly saving their lives – alerting them to enemy soldiers and to the booby traps that the North Vietnamese were known for leaving behind. The British developed Labrador retrievers as jungle trackers in part because the easygoing dogs could adapt to





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different handlers as soldiers rotated out of teams at the ends of their combat tours, Merritt says.

"There's something about a Lab that makes it a great tracker," says Taitano, who was the least likely dog handler. He grew up in Guam, where dogs are considered a nuisance, not pets or working animals. "When we see a dog in Guam, we kill it," he says.

But a black Lab named Moose captured Taitano's heart. "I had a best friend," he says. "It's a privilege to work with a dog who gives you unconditional love." He tried to buy Moose at the end of his tour so he could take his tracking companion home. But the Army wouldn't allow the dogs to leave Vietnam because of the risk of spreading diseases they acquired in Southeast Asia. That still bothers the trackers.

"The terrible thing is, the dogs were left behind – and the Vietnamese eat dog," Peterson says. "That was always gut-wrenching."

### **"We saved lives by not letting the enemy get away."**

Once the North Vietnamese caught on to the tracker teams, they tried to develop ways to confuse them. A withdrawing enemy unit would have a couple of soldiers go off in a completely different direction, even dropping articles of clothing and leaving other obvious signs, Dupla says. His team lost a visual tracker and a cover man to enemy snipers as they checked out one of those false trails – the only men from his team who were killed during his tour.

The North Vietnamese also placed a bounty on the trackers rumored to be the equivalent of three or four years' pay for an enemy soldier.

"It made you feel good at the time," Peterson says. "But it caught up with you afterward."

Sometimes the greater risk was friendly fire. One evening, Dupla's team found itself between the North Vietnamese contingent it had been tracking and an American unit it didn't realize was in the area.

"We stopped to call for a helicopter," Dupla says. "And all hell broke loose." He ended up with a piece of shrapnel in his shoulder from a grenade that could have come from either an American or a North Vietnamese soldier. "That was close," he says. "A couple of inches' difference, and it would have hit my head."

The infantry units also often misunderstood the trackers' role. In many cases, commanders wanted to use the team to walk point, not chase down the enemy. "I think it was just that a lot of companies

and platoons had never heard of us, so they had no idea how we operated," Peterson says.

The U.S. contract with the British Jungle Warfare School ended in 1969, and the tracker training program at Fort Gordon opened. Steward taught at the school for a year, then returned to Vietnam for a disappointing second tour with the trackers from 1970 to 1971.

"Vietnam was a different place," Steward says. "The Americans were trying to turn more responsibility over to the South Vietnamese army to lessen U.S. casualties." There was less follow-through when the trackers engaged the enemy, he adds. "It was not a good experience."

The Army discontinued the program in late 1971, and the quiet legacy of the combat trackers faded. "We saved lives by not letting the enemy get away," says Peterson, who started as a cover man and became a team leader. But the secrecy of the program cost the trackers recognition.

"We had a lot of kills, but the credit always went to the infantry unit we were with," adds Steward, who went on to make a career in the Army and retired as a sergeant major. "And we're so small, we'll never get the notoriety the Special Forces did."

But the combat trackers are leaving a trail. The U.S. Army Combat Tracker Team Memorial was erected at Fort Benning, Ga., in the early 2000s. The Merritts also created a website for the Vietnam combat tracker teams, [combattrackerteam.org](http://combattrackerteam.org), more than a decade ago. That helped a couple of military gear collectors reunite Herbert with his M65 field jacket, with its rare combat-tracker shoulder patch intact, after it turned up in a North Carolina thrift store in 2009. Herbert had loaned it to a friend for a hunting trip in the late 1970s and never saw it again.

The trackers have also been holding annual reunions since 2000. They will dedicate a stone bench, engraved with the names of trackers and dogs killed in action, at the Ohio Veterans Memorial Park in Clinton in June, thanks to the efforts of tracker John Carroll.

Beyond these clues, however, the trackers remain as mysterious to the American public and many of their fellow soldiers as to the North Vietnamese they surprised.

"There's so many people who have no idea about the trackers and what we did," Steward says. "Our legacy will never be known." 🌿

*Ken Olsen is a frequent contributor to The American Legion Magazine.*



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*Brendan Marrocco uses one of his transplanted arms to brush his hair back during a news conference at The Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore on Jan. 29. Marrocco received a transplant of two arms from a deceased donor nearly four years after losing all four limbs in a roadside bomb attack in Iraq. In 2010.*

*AP/Gail Burton*





# THE GIFT OF ARMS

*After 22 surgeries and years of waiting for the right donor, Iraq veteran Brendan Marrocco is celebrating a successful bilateral transplant.*

BY KEN OLSEN

## **Brendan Marrocco has new arms.**

Nearly four years after an armor-piercing roadside bomb claimed all four of his limbs, Brendan became the first person in the United States to receive such an extensive bilateral arm transplant. Now he sees the day when he's driving himself to the store or racing his Dodge Charger.

"It makes me feel more human," Brendan says. "It's given me more confidence about myself. It's something I was waiting for a long time."

His family is astounded and grateful.

"It just blows my mind," says his mother, Michelle, who is a nurse. "I look at his arms, and I think, 'How can it be? You have two sets of DNA here but it heals like any cut.'"

"It's been a very emotional time," adds Brendan's father, Alex. "We owe it all to a family who, in the midst of their sorrow and the midst of their loss, made a selfless decision to be a part of Brendan's life."

The arm transplants, which took place at The Johns Hopkins Hospital just before Christmas last year, also give hope to others who have lost hands and arms. “This is groundbreaking work,” says Col. John Scherer of the Armed Forces Institute of Regenerative Medicine (AFIRM), which is helping fund limb transplants and other clinical trials for wounded warriors. “This will allow us to understand how the body will adapt to new arms.”

Brendan was injured on Easter Sunday 2009 when a roadside bomb ripped open the armored truck he was driving during a night mission 130 miles north of Baghdad. The bomb cost him his arms and legs, burned his body and damaged his left eye. When Alex and Michelle first walked into Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany, they did not recognize their son. “We wouldn’t have known it was him if someone hadn’t told us,” Alex says.

Brendan was the first surviving quadruple amputee from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Soon after he arrived at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, he told his medical team that he wanted to be standing on the tarmac in Hawaii to greet his unit when they returned in about six months.

And he was.

Brendan’s recovery continued to defy expectations. He mastered his first set of prosthetic legs in five weeks with the help of Walter Reed’s rehabilitation team and his brother Mike, who quit his job on Wall Street to become his primary caregiver. He caught the attention of Gen. James Amos, then assistant Marine Corps commandant, who asked Brendan if he was interested in arm transplants. A few weeks later, Brendan met with pioneering surgeon Dr. W.P. Andrew Lee, then at the University of Pittsburgh, who developed a limb transplant regimen using a fraction of the immunosuppression drugs required for organ transplants, which have serious side effects.

Brendan had no second thoughts. “Pretty much from the get-go, I thought it was great,” he says.

Michelle, though, was angry, feeling that someone was giving her son false hope. That turned to worry when she learned that arm and hand transplants were really possible. “My greatest fear was that he would die on the operating table,” she says. “This is major elective surgery. Anything can happen. But it wasn’t my decision to make.”

Michelle also tried to persuade Brendan to have just a right-arm transplant to reduce his reliance on people post-surgery, given that he was doing well with the myoelectric prosthesis on his left side. “He doesn’t want to be dependent,” she says.

But prosthetic arms “were never the endpoint for

me,” Brendan says. And Michelle says that she admires his courage, considering that he faced an additional three years of rehabilitation and a lifetime medication regimen as a result of the transplants.

Getting the arms alone proved a long and frustrating journey. Finding the right donor is difficult. Donor limbs have to be the same size, build and skin tone as well as matching the recipient’s blood and tissue types. After waiting for a donor for a year, Brendan contracted a bone infection and had to drop off the transplant list for 10 months.

“He was very discouraged,” Michelle says.

Brendan left Walter Reed in July 2011 and moved into a specialized home on Staten Island, N.Y., near where he grew up. The house was built with funds raised by the Stephen Siller Tunnel to Towers Foundation, Building Homes for Heroes and the Brendan Marrocco Road to Recovery Trust.

Lee, meanwhile, moved to Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine to become chairman of the plastic and reconstructive surgery department, and continued to prepare for the operation. Brendan would require the most complicated transplant surgery Lee’s team had ever performed. “It is really the first time in the country two arms were transplanted – the left arm to the elbow joint and the right arm above the elbow,” he says.

The left-arm transplant was especially challenging because Brendan didn’t have enough remaining muscle to operate a wrist or hand. Yet Lee wanted to preserve Brendan’s left elbow so that in the unlikely event that the transplant wasn’t successful, he would retain use of the joint.

Surgeons, nurses, anesthesiologists and other members of the team began meeting two years before the actual operation. They practiced the surgery on cadavers four times, right down to detaching and attaching the bones, nerves, tendons and skin. Each of the 16 surgeons had a specific task. One was responsible for preparing the bone on the right recipient arm, another for the muscle on the left donor arm.



### A SOLDIER’S WISH

See how The American Legion helped Brendan Marrocco make his way to Hawaii, where he stood and walked without assistance when his unit returned from Iraq in 2009.

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*Dr. W.P. Andrew Lee talks to the media about Marrocco's bilateral arm transplant at The Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore. The surgeon and his team began practicing for the operation two years before it took place. AP/Gail Burton*

"Going in," Lee says, "everyone knew what he or she was going to do."

Brendan was at his father's house when he received a call from Lee on Dec. 16 telling him that they might finally have a donor. "I got a text from Brendan saying something like, 'I think you'll want to get home early,'" Alex says. "That meant one of two things. Either the roof is leaking again, or he got the arms phone call."

Michelle and Mike were having lunch at a Staten Island restaurant when they got the word from Brendan. "I started to shake," says Michelle, who had kept her suitcase packed the entire first year Brendan was on the transplant list.

The family traveled to Baltimore together on Dec. 17. Brendan's transplant surgery began at 1:30 the next morning in an operating room crowded with medical staff, microscopes, a portable X-ray machine and other equipment. "Operating rooms are not designed for bilateral arm transplants," Lee says.

Thanks in large part to the teamwork among doctors and nurses, however, it worked. Brendan had new arms after 13 hours of surgery – his 22nd operation since he was wounded.

He woke from the surgery excited, but confused from the anesthesia. "I was looking around for my arms," he says. "It was weird because I couldn't find them at first."

Two weeks after the surgery, Brendan received an infusion of the donor's bone marrow, part of the protocol Lee developed to help trick the immune system into accepting the new limbs. So far, Brendan hasn't experienced any rejection.

"That's the biggest hurdle of all transplants," says Scherer, who is director of the Army's Clinical and Rehabilitative Medicine Research Program in addition to his work with AFIRM. "We'll revolutionize the transplant world if we can dramatically reduce or eliminate immunosuppression."

Brendan's success is good news for other wounded warriors contemplating limb transplants. More servicemembers have lost multiple limbs as insurgents develop more powerful IEDs, Lee says. About 300 have had major upper-extremity amputations as a result of combat in Iraq and Afghanistan. A number of them are going through the screening process for transplants.

Brendan spends four to six hours a day in hand therapy, six days a week. "I should be getting decent function in the coming year," he says. "It will be a couple of years before I get feeling." The nerves regrow a maximum of an inch a month.

He credits his family as the single most important element in his recovery and looks forward to giving them a break. "Being independent is definitely my main goal – being able to do what I want and not having to worry about someone being around the whole time," he says.

In a few months, Brendan will move to Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, where he will get back on his prosthetic legs as well as work to strengthen his new arms and hands. He hasn't used his legs in about 18 months. "Not having arms, you aren't able to keep your balance. Once you lose your balance, you can't grab anything."

In the long term, Brendan will continue working on the 2006 Dodge Charger that he plans to race one day. People who know him aren't surprised. "I thoroughly expect him to scare the hell out of me," Michelle says, although she isn't sure she's up for watching Brendan race. "I'll support him in any way I can, but that might be pushing it." 🍀

*Ken Olsen is a frequent contributor to The American Legion Magazine.*

## **SUPERSTORM DAMAGES SPECIALLY BUILT HOME**

Last October, Superstorm Sandy flooded part of the high-tech "smart home" built for Brendan Marrocco with funds raised by the Stephen Siller Tunnel to Towers Foundation, Building Homes for Heroes and the Brendan Marrocco Road to Recovery Trust. Donations are now being raised to repair the house, where Brendan has lived since June 2011. Alex Marrocco, who lost his pickup while checking on the home during the storm, plans to revamp the house so that it is not vulnerable to flood damage from future storms. He is also establishing a foundation to help other soldiers and organizations.

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Photo by Daniel Swiger

# Monument Man

*Want to build a memorial but don't know where to start?  
Ask Marine Corps vet Michael L. Emerson, who's become an expert.*

**BY MATT GRILLS**

**I**n 2002, a visit to Ground Zero left Michael L. Emerson frustrated. The devastation of 9/11 still haunted New York and the Pentagon, but he heard few people talking about the 40 Americans who died in a crash near Shanksville, Pa., after fighting their plane's hijackers. Emerson returned to his home in the San Francisco Bay area, determined to build a local memorial to the heroes of Flight 93. His success earned him a spot on the steering committee for the Flight 93 National Memorial and invitations to build or support other memorial projects around the country.

A Marine Corps veteran of Desert Storm and a member of American Legion Post 649 in Castro Valley, Calif., Emerson recently talked with *The American Legion Magazine* about his decade of planning, designing and contributing to some of the nation's newest memorials.

## ***What memorials are you working on now?***

I'm currently designing and building a 9/11 memorial in Hayward, Calif. I'm also helping build a Cold War national memorial in Las Vegas, and since I am a 60-percent disabled veteran, I wanted to help build the American Veterans Disabled for Life Memorial in Washington, D.C. Now, the one in Washington, I'm just on the periphery; I've helped collect funds and support it any way I can. The one in Nevada, I'm actually on the committee. I helped finalize the design, and I'm going to be helping collect donations to pay for it.

I have a lot of support from friends – civilians, active duty, veterans. Not everybody can do as much as I do, but they often do one thing that gives me time to do other stuff or support me some other way. Some people's hobby is fishing or golf. Mine is designing and building memorials.



### **How did your first project, the Flight 93 Memorial in Union City, Calif., lead to others?**

It took me five years to build that memorial, and I learned quite a lot about the process, whether it's the type of materials or load bearing for earthquakes we get here in California. I don't have any sort of engineering or architectural degree, but I'm not a dumb person, and I just learned from all these really great people. Two different companies – one out of Elberton, Ga., and one out of Wausau, Wis. – donated the granite, which would have cost a fortune, and yet they donated it all. There was not one penny that had to be paid to build the memorial. Everything from the labor to the materials was completely donated.

When we dedicated the memorial, the National Park Service came, which was surprising to me. After, I had a small reception at my house, inviting the family members and a few other people, and the National Park Service guy came, too. After they all left, he stayed and said, "We're impressed with what you did here. We would like to have you help us build the Flight 93 National Memorial in Shanksville, Pa." I was greatly honored and immediately agreed.

When that one was done, my VFW and American Legion posts came to me and said, "Michael, you've got these connections. You know what you're doing. Will you design and build a veterans memorial here in Castro Valley?" I said, "Absolutely." For this one, I used what I learned. I designed everything, I got all the contractors, but I said, "We're going to collect all the money, all the materials, and instead of dragging it out for five years, I want it done in two or three months," and that's what we did. We pulled the trigger in June and it was done by the end of August. It wasn't in the way of people. We built an extremely beautiful memorial that everyone says should be in Washington, D.C. I'm very proud of that.

### **How has The American Legion supported your work?**

Back in 2004 or 2005, my American Legion post donated \$1,000 for the Flight 93 memorial. For the Castro Valley Veterans Memorial, my post gave \$1,000 to donate a bench. The district American Legion also donated \$1,000. The American Legion has been a big supporter of the things I've done.

In 2008, I went to the national convention in Phoenix, where the Legion passed a resolution that I wrote supporting the building of the Flight 93 National Memorial in Shanksville, and thousands of dollars have been donated by Legion posts around the country to help build it. The Legacy Run had (the site) as a stop a few years ago, before the memorial was even built. It was great knowing the national commander and the Legacy Run guys went there.



**Flight 93 Memorial, Union City, Calif.** Photo by Daniel Swiger

 [www.93memorial.com](http://www.93memorial.com)



**Castro Valley Veterans Memorial, Castro Valley, Calif.** Photo by Daniel Swiger

 [www.cvvm.info](http://www.cvvm.info)



**Flight 93 National Memorial** Photo by Daniel Swiger

 [www.honorflight93.org](http://www.honorflight93.org)

### **What inspires your designs?**

I won't say that I'm not going to cherry-pick ideas. With the Flight 93 Memorial, what inspired me was the bombing memorial in Oklahoma City and its individual chairs with lights underneath. At the same time, I don't want to copy someone else. I want it to be unique, but in a traditional sense. My motto has always been "elegance in simplicity" – elegant, not super-busy. Some people have said, "You should do a fountain" or "You should do an eternal flame." When they work, they're beautiful, but I want to build something that can be easy for a city to maintain.

I also try to make sure that it allows people to just be able to contemplate. There's a lot of symbolism in the Flight 93 Memorial, where each of the stones' fronts are polished, but the sides and backs are left unfinished to signify unfinished lives. The front of each has a titanium stainless steel mirror. It's a way for people to reflect: "How would I have reacted?"

At the Castro Valley memorial, we added four metal skateboard stops to the top of each bench. But on the POW bench, there's one missing, signifying a missing man. I try to make people think, but I also want it to be beautiful.

### **How much thought do you give to the future of the memorials you help build?**

It's definitely something I took into account prior to doing my very first one. With the Flight 93 memorial, I leased the land for \$1 a month, so it was like my property. At the dedication, I gave it back to the city. The memorandum of understanding states very clearly that the city will maintain the memorial in perpetuity. I make these memorials out of granite and concrete so they will last for generations. My goal is for them to last at least 300 years. For Flight 93, I had \$28,000 left over in cash donations that I gave to the city as a kind of maintenance fund. We're currently collecting a maintenance fund for the veterans memorial.

I have two sons who will be 14 and 10 this year. We go quite often to the memorials to pick up trash and make sure there's no graffiti. My oldest, Nickolas, turned to me and said, out of the blue, "You know, Papa, when you die I'll take care of this for you." To have my 14-year-old tell me that gives me hope for the future of our country.

I'm proud to do these memorials, but I don't get paid a dime. I get paid in thanks, a feeling of accomplishment and pride. I'm inspired by them, by the people who help me, and by the people they're built to honor.

### **Describe the Hayward 9/11 memorial.**

I've learned what materials give you more bang for the buck. I'm also trying to get as much as I can donated. I'm going to incorporate a lot of marble and concrete. I don't use bronze or materials that could be stolen or damaged. I've built a lot of relationships with contractors and manufacturers. The same company that donated the 40 granite stones for the Flight 93 memorial in Union City has told me it will donate more than half the granite I need for this new memorial. And almost everyone who helped me with the Castro Valley Veterans Memorial that we built and dedicated on Veterans Day has signed on to donate and help build this 9/11 memorial. We put the donors' names on the website, we engrave their names in granite on the memorial, so people can come with their families and say, "Look, I helped build this." It's a way to be more connected to the community, connected to the nation and connected to history.

#### **OTHER LINKS**

**Michael L. Emerson's website**

 [www.michael-emerson.com](http://www.michael-emerson.com)

**Silent Heroes of the Cold War Memorial**

 [coldwarmonument.org](http://coldwarmonument.org)

**American Veterans Disabled for Life Memorial**

 [www.avdlm.org](http://www.avdlm.org)

### **What advice would you give to an individual or group wanting to build a veterans memorial?**

Call or email me! I'll walk you through the process. The most important thing, in my opinion, is to get good people around you. Get a bunch of people who are like-minded behind you. You can't expect to have it finished in just a few months or a year. It takes time to collect money, get permits and all that. It's worth the time, but you have to be patient and understanding with other people, especially if they're volunteering.

I think a key ingredient is to have everything ready before you start. Leave the space exactly the way it is until you have all the money, all the designs, all the people in line. Get it done as quickly as possible so there isn't too much inconvenience to the community. You want its support.

It's not as hard as you think. One of the nice things about 9/11 memorials or veterans memorials is that no one says they're a bad idea. 🌿

*Matt Grills is managing editor of The American Legion Magazine.*



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# The new tax landscape

*The fiscal cliff deal offers more relief from uncertainty than tax relief. Here's how.*

BY J.J. MONTANARO



Veer

On Jan. 2, President Barack Obama signed the American Taxpayer Relief Act of 2012 into law. The eleventh-hour negotiations ended with an agreement that extended most Bush-era tax cuts and staved off the tax component of the much-anticipated “fiscal cliff.” With the dust settled on the tax debate, it’s an appropriate time to evaluate what the new tax law means for 2013 and beyond.

From a practical standpoint, the relief referenced in the title of the law is more about relief from uncertainty than from taxes. In 2013 and beyond, most taxpayers will see higher taxes than they did in 2012. However, the law solidifies the rules in many areas without requiring annual year-end negotiations.

For working Americans, the most immediate and tangible component of the new law relates to what isn’t there: an extension of the Social Security payroll tax cut put in place two years earlier. In 2013, Social Security tax rates returned to their old level of 6.2 percent on wages up to \$113,700. Self-employed individuals saw their rate increase by the same 2 percent, to 12.4 percent. This represents a \$1,200 reduction in spendable income for a family with \$60,000 in wages.

**THE INCREASES** For all but those at the highest levels of income, the bad news relative to taxes began and ended with the Social Security rate increase. The Bush-era tax brackets of 10, 15, 25, 28, 33 and 35 percent remain the same and were made permanent. The only major changes were the shrinking of the 35-percent bracket and the

introduction of the 39.6-percent bracket for those with incomes above \$400,000 (\$450,000 for married couples filing jointly).

Capital gains and dividends will continue to be taxed at a maximum rate of 15 percent unless a taxpayer’s income exceeds \$400,000 (\$450,000 married filing jointly). Furthermore, capital gains up to income levels at the top of the 15-percent tax bracket (\$72,500 joint/\$36,250 single filers) will continue to avoid taxation.

The highest-income earners face tax increases from several directions: higher tax rates, new taxes, and reduced or eliminated exemptions and deductions.

As mentioned earlier, a new 39.6-percent tax bracket was added for incomes of more than \$400,000 (\$450,000 married filing jointly). Increases also extend to capital gains and dividend income subject to this new tax bracket. A higher 20-percent rate, along with a new health-care tax of 3.8 percent on investment income, results in an effective rate of 23.8 percent.

As for reductions in exemptions and deductions, beginning in 2013 taxpayers with an income above \$250,000 (\$300,000 married filing jointly) will see their ability to claim personal exemptions and itemized deductions reduced or eliminated depending on their income.

**THE EXTENSIONS** A number of deductions, exemptions and tax-law provisions that were set to expire were also extended by the new law. These moves offer continued tax relief, and in some cases



relief from the need to wait each year for last-minute legislation to clear up the tax landscape:

- **AMT extension.** Millions of Americans can now stop worrying about being drawn into the web of the Alternative Minimum Tax (AMT). Implemented in 1982 to target the wealthiest Americans, this tax calculation excludes personal exemptions, miscellaneous deductions and even deductions for state and local taxes. Prior to the implementation of the new law, legislation was required each year to increase the exemption amount. Without that legislation, a dramatically higher number of taxpayers would have been subject to the AMT each year. The new tax law permanently increases the exemption and indexes it to inflation.

- **State and local sales tax deduction.** Those who itemize deductions are still able to choose between taking a deduction for state and local sales tax or state and local income taxes. This is particularly valuable for residents of locations without a state income tax. Unlike many other items that were permanently extended, this provision was extended only through 2013.

- **Child tax credit.** The \$1,000 tax credit per qualifying child was set to revert to \$500 but was permanently extended.

**THE INCENTIVES** With more than a trillion dollars of student-loan debt hanging like a dark cloud over millions of Americans, the American Taxpayer Relief Act provided a number of welcome provisions related to education:

- **American Opportunity Tax Credit.** This annual credit of up to \$2,500, available for the first four years of post-secondary study, has been extended through 2017.

- **Student-loan interest deduction.** The law updates this deduction of up to \$2,500 (available whether a filer itemizes or not) by permanently eliminating the 60-month limitation on how long interest can be deducted.

- **Coverdell Education Savings Account.** Prior improvements that were set to expire, such as a higher \$2,000 contribution limit and availability for elementary and secondary expenses, were made permanent.

**ESTATE CHANGES** With changing rules, exemptions and the looming threat of a return to 2001 levels, estate planning has been a difficult proposition over the past decade. The new law provides a solid planning landscape by making a number of permanent changes. These include a 40-percent maximum estate tax rate, the ability to

pass on \$5 million per person through an inflation-adjusted exclusion for gift and estate tax, and the ability to take advantage of a deceased spouse's unused portion of the exclusion. The law also extended through 2013 a provision that lets a taxpayer 70½ or older make tax-free distributions of up to \$100,000 from IRAs to public charities. The changes make this an ideal time to seek assistance from an estate-planning attorney.

**A PLAN OF YOUR OWN** Given the current state of financial affairs in Washington, it seems unlikely that tax rates will go back down any time soon. Further, it seems reasonable to believe that rates will either remain the same or increase. So it's important to explore several opportunities:

- **Investment selection and positioning.** Higher tax rates generally make tax-exempt municipal bonds more attractive for many taxpayers, while diluting the real return of many investments held outside of tax-sheltered investments. These same rates make it crucial to consider tax-efficient investing and the right vehicle for investments. For example, income-producing investments may be better suited for tax-advantaged accounts, such as a 401(k) or IRA. Seek the counsel of a CPA or financial adviser to determine which options are most suitable.

- **Roth conversion.** Those who anticipate higher taxes in the future may consider converting traditional IRA and retirement-plan funds to tax-free Roth holdings. The new tax law makes it easier for taxpayers to convert money already in employer plans from traditional to Roth. This strategy could be implemented in a manner that takes advantage of the lower tax brackets in place for most taxpayers.

While it certainly does not end the debate over taxes, spending or the direction of the country, the American Taxpayer Relief Act of 2012 provides a solid foundation for tax and financial planning in coming years. It serves as a reminder to meet with tax, financial and estate planning professionals to create or update an appropriate plan. 🌿

*J.J. Montanaro is a certified financial planner with USAA Financial Planning Services, one of the USAA family of companies. USAA is The American Legion's preferred provider for financial services.*

#### HAVE QUESTIONS? CALL USAA

For each new USAA member who purchases any product, the company contributes funds to American Legion programs. Join online at [www.usaa.com/legion](http://www.usaa.com/legion) or call toll-free (877) 699-2654.



Photo by Brett Flashnick

## LEADERSHIP

## Koutz addresses South Carolina lawmakers

American Legion National Commander Jim Koutz carried on a tradition dating to the 1960s when he testified during a joint session of the South Carolina Legislature on March 5.

From the podium, Koutz addressed lawmakers, more than 40 members of the Legion and Auxiliary, and other guests on a range of topics, including:

- **A donation the previous day by the Operation Comfort Warriors program to the Warrior Transition Unit at Fort Jackson:** “(OCW) will not necessarily change the lives of our wounded, injured and ill veterans. But it might make their day. And, even more importantly, it shows them that we care and appreciate their service and sacrifice for this nation.”
- **The importance of hiring veterans:** “Veterans have undergone strenuous training, performed in high-stress environments, and bring a set of skills and discipline from which most employers and communities can truly benefit.”
- **The loss of three South Carolina National Guard members – Lt. Ryan Davis Rawl, Sgt. 1st Class Matthew “Brad” Thomas and Spc. John Meador – who were killed by a suicide bomber in Afghanistan last June:** “All of these men were fathers and husbands. They are remembered by hundreds of family members and friends who loved them.”
- **Veteran recognition on driver’s licenses:** “If you are not retired, you no longer carry a military ID. That is one of the many reasons why this recognition on the driver’s licenses is important and was strongly supported by The American Legion Department of South Carolina. I hope more states follow your example.”

## MEMBERSHIP

## Dues renewal can now be automatic

The time, effort and postage of American Legion membership dues renewal can all be saved through the new online Automatic Annual Renewal Program, now available. Members can simply go to [www.legion.org/renew](http://www.legion.org/renew) and click “Renew Now” to safely and conveniently pay their post dues on an annual, automatic basis.



### AUTOMATIC RENEWAL

Once a member enters the information requested, he or she can set the account for automatic annual renewal.

Automatic renewal can also be set up by calling the toll-free American Legion customer service line at **(800) 433-3318**.

Following industry standards to protect members’ personal financial safety, the Legion will maintain a record of those participating in the program and, at the beginning of each new membership year, will automatically process the renewal, charging it to the member’s credit or debit card of choice. The transaction would occur on or around July 15 of each year.

Once dues are successfully renewed automatically online, members will receive confirmation by email. Thus, it is important that the Legion has updated email addresses for participating members. To report a change of email address, phone number or other contact information, members can call **(800) 433-3318**, send an email to [cs@legion.org](mailto:cs@legion.org), or go online at [www.legion.org/membershipmanagement](http://www.legion.org/membershipmanagement) and use the “Change Address” option.

## HISTORY

## Brick campaign helps build Army museum, to open in 2017

The Army Historical Foundation (AHF) has launched a brick campaign to support the building of the National Museum of the United States Army in Fort Belvoir, Va.

Available in two sizes – \$250 for 4 x 8, \$500 for 8 x 8 – the bricks can be personalized to honor individual soldiers, Army

veterans and Department of the Army civilians. They’ll be installed on the Path of Remembrance, a walkway leading visitors to the museum’s main entrance, in time for the museum’s planned 2017 opening.

“These commemorative bricks will serve as ideal stage-setters for the museum’s central theme: soldiers’ stories,” said Kerri Kline, AHF’s director of donor initiatives and museum relations.

Full-size and miniature replicas of the inscribed bricks are also available at an additional cost.

In 2005, The American Legion passed Resolution 17, which supports the building of the National Museum of the United States Army.

 [www.armyhistory.org/bricks](http://www.armyhistory.org/bricks)



Photo courtesy Army Historical Foundation



**VERBATIM**

**“May God forgive you  
for what you’ve done.”**

Pope Francis, joking with cardinals after they elected him to lead the world's 1.2 billion Catholics on March 14. Jorge Mario Bergoglio of Argentina is the first Latin American, and the first Jesuit priest, to head the church.



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## GALLERY

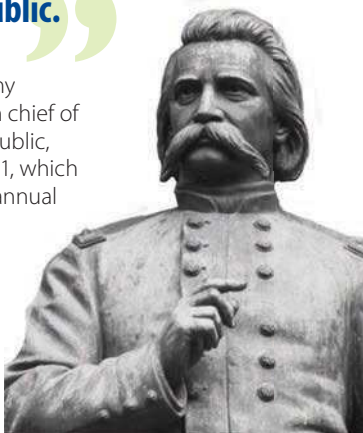


Members of Warner-VanRiper Post 435 in Waterloo, N.Y., display a sign in their meeting room recognizing the village's Memorial Day roots. On May 5, 1866, Waterloo held the first formal, village-wide observance of a day devoted to honoring U.S. war dead. In 1966, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed a proclamation designating Waterloo the birthplace of Memorial Day. Photo by Eldon Lindsay

## VERBATIM

**Let no vandalism of avarice or neglect, no ravages of time, testify to the present or to the coming generations, that we have forgotten, as a people, the cost of a free and undivided republic.**

**John A. Logan**, Union Army general and commander in chief of the Grand Army of the Republic, issuing General Order No. 11, which established May 30 as the annual date "for the purpose of strewing flowers, or otherwise decorating the graves of comrades who died in the defense of their country." First called Decoration Day, it later became Memorial Day.



## HONOR

## Normandy remembered

On June 6, 1945, newly liberated French citizens began celebrating the anniversary of the Normandy invasion. Power had yet to be restored. Rubble was still strewn through the villages. But a handful of U.S. veterans and some active-duty troops made their way to Ste. Mère-Église for a parade in their honor, even though World War II was two months away from ending. Now, tens of thousands attend.

Amis des Vétérans Américains (AVA) – Friends of American Veterans – was formed to welcome U.S. veterans and military personnel to Normandy each year to honor the memory of the invasion and pay tribute to the fallen.

Led by Maurice Renaud, son of the D-Day mayor of Ste. Mère-Église, the AVA will honor American Legion National Commander Jim Koutz at its annual dinner on June 8. He and Past National Commanders Fang Wong and Jimmie Foster are honorary AVA members. Learn more by emailing AVA at [ava50480@gmail.com](mailto:ava50480@gmail.com).





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## WASHINGTON CONFERENCE

## Focus: backlog, jobs, budget cuts

Hundreds of American Legion members gathered in Washington in late February – as massive federal budget cuts were about to begin as a result of sequestration – and heard from elected officials, military officers, a U.S. ambassador and many others before visiting congressional delegations on Capitol Hill. Atop The American Legion's priority list were the VA backlog of undecided claims, the effect of sequestration on the U.S. military, improving employment opportunities for veterans, better mental health care for veterans and enhanced services for women veterans. See a complete roundup of stories, videos and photo galleries online.

 [www.legion.org/washingtonconference](http://www.legion.org/washingtonconference)



## Former senator honored for Post-9/11 GI Bill

*"I know what it's like to sit at home and wake up every morning wondering if your kid is still alive. Those things motivate me every day of my life, and they were the principal reason that the day I was sworn into the Senate, I put into the hopper the Post-9/11 GI Bill."*

Former U.S. Sen. James Webb of Virginia, after receiving The American Legion's Distinguished Public Service Award on Feb. 26 in Washington. The highly decorated Vietnam War combat Marine was the architect of the Post-9/11 GI Bill, which has been used by nearly 1 million veterans since its 2008 passage. Webb and the Legion worked closely to include provisions that would make the benefit more relevant to today's student veterans, including his own son, Jimmy, also a Marine.

*"More than 300,000 people go to work every day at the Department of Veterans Affairs. Most are hard-working. Some are not. As with any organization, a small contingent of problematic employees can do a lot to hinder progress."*



U.S. Rep. Jeff Miller, R-Fla., chairman of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, in a speech to Legionnaires that focused on VA's lack of progress on the benefits claims backlog

**50** Number of employers that participated in the Washington Conference job fair, produced by the Economic Commission and RecruitMilitary, LLC

*"One of the things I've learned is that we need more veterans in Washington, because we know how to get the job done."*

U.S. Rep. Tammy Duckworth, D-Ill., a combat veteran and former National Guard captain who lost both legs when the helicopter she was piloting was shot down in Iraq in 2004. She was elected to Congress last fall.



Percentage of National Cemetery Administration (NCA) employees who are veterans, the most of any federal agency. That includes 406 veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan, according to NCA officials.

**74**

## PREPARE, PROVIDE, PROTECT

The three P's identified by Department of Labor Assistant Secretary Keith Kelly regarding efforts to connect veterans and troops in transition with decent careers. "We **prepare** our servicemembers and their spouses to transition from the military to the civilian workforce. We **provide** our veterans with the critical resources, expertise and training to assist them in locating and obtaining meaningful careers. We **protect** the employment rights of the men and women who serve our nation."

**188,000**

Expected reduction in the Army's soldier count between now and 2017 under sequestration, according to Maj. Gen. Jeffrey Snow, the Army's director of strategy, plans and policy. Snow addressed Legionnaires in a speech at the 53rd Washington Conference.



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## WASHINGTON CONFERENCE

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**American Legion National Commander Jim Koutz**, in a letter to former "ABC World News Tonight" co-anchor Bob Woodruff, who suffered a traumatic brain injury after a roadside bomb explosion while he was covering the war in Iraq



See a video about Bob Woodruff and his experience, presented to Legionnaires at the 53rd Washington Conference. [www.legion.org/washingtonconference](http://www.legion.org/washingtonconference)

72

**The average age of a VA volunteer, according to Laura Balun, director of voluntary services for the Department of Veterans Affairs. Balun expressed gratitude for the more than 8,400 Legionnaires who now participate in VA Volunteer Services but is concerned that the 863,000 hours of Legion assistance is down by 80,000 from the previous year. She said the two areas of greatest need are volunteers to provide transportation for veterans and respite for caregivers at home.**

*I was 18 years old, in the infantry, spent all my time in the Pacific, seeing kamikaze attacks and other things. And some of the inhuman things that went on by the enemy to our soldiers, I can't even describe, and I won't. If it hadn't been for that atomic bomb, I wouldn't be sitting here. We were just over their horizon, waiting to make sure that treaty was signed. And had it not been signed, we would have invaded Japan, and a lot of us – I'd say multitudes of us – would have not come home.*



**World War II veteran and American Legion National Executive Committeeman William Christoffersen of Utah**, in a panel discussion about the film "Emperor," which was screened during the 53rd Washington Conference before it hit screens nationwide on March 8. The film, starring Tommy Lee Jones, explores Gen. Douglas MacArthur's investigation into the role Emperor Hirohito played in the Pearl Harbor attack and Japan's actions during World War II, and whether or not he should have been tried for war crimes. The panel discussion included producers and a military adviser who worked on the film. See a video of the panel discussion. [www.legion.org/washingtonconference](http://www.legion.org/washingtonconference)

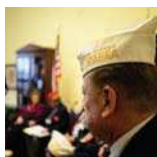
500

**Approximate number of veterans who came to the job fair looking for new careers**

*The good news is that for the last three years, VA has processed more than 1 million claims a year. The problem is that more claims are coming in. This year, I understand, there will be about 1.2 million claims coming in and about a million being processed. You're adding 200,000 to the backlog. VA efforts have been outpaced by new claims filings in each of the last three years, further compounding the backlog ... Whatever the reason, I remain deeply troubled by the growth and persistence of the claims backlog. I refuse to accept the status quo. We will work with you. We will work with VA.*



**Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., chairman of the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs**, in a speech before hundreds of Legionnaires gathered for the 53rd Washington Conference



View a photo gallery from the 53rd Washington Conference

[www.legion.org/washingtonconference](http://www.legion.org/washingtonconference)



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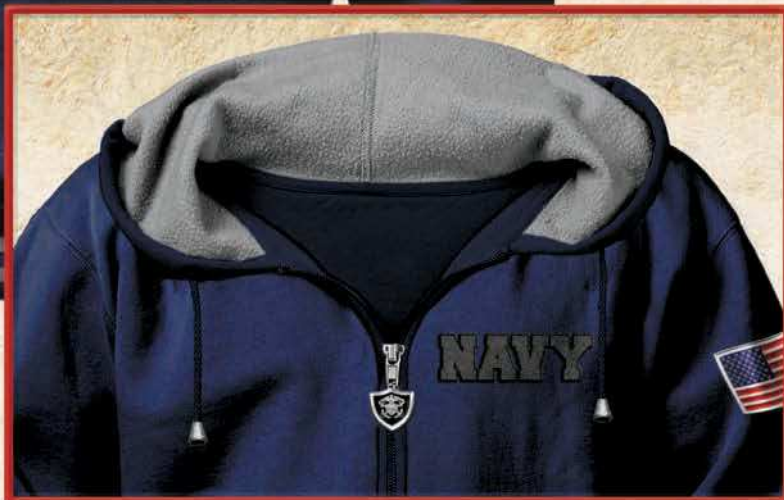
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## ASK A SERVICE OFFICER

## VA's priority groups for health care



**Cajun Comeau**  
Department Service  
Officer, North Carolina

**Q. What are VA's health-care priority groups?**

**A.** Since funding from Congress is limited, VA set up eight priority groups to make sure that certain groups of veterans are enrolled before others. A veteran is assigned a priority group based on eligibility status, with 1 being the highest priority.

**Priority Group 1** Veterans

with 50 percent or higher service-connected disability ratings and/or determined by VA to be unemployable

**Priority Group 2** Veterans with service-connected ratings at 30 or 40 percent

**Priority Group 3** POWs, Purple Heart recipients and veterans who were discharged for disabilities incurred or aggravated in the line of duty, service-connected at 10 percent or 20 percent, and receiving benefits under 38 U.S. Code 1151 or vocational rehabilitation

**Priority Group 4** Veterans in receipt of compensation or pension at housebound or aid-and-attendance rates, as well as veterans determined by VA to be catastrophically disabled

**Priority Group 5** Non-service-connected veterans and noncompensable service-connected veterans rated at 0 percent and with a net worth not greater than VA financial thresholds, and veterans receiving pension benefits or eligible for Medicaid

**Priority Group 6** Veterans who are 0 percent service-connected, were exposed to ionizing radiation, served in Vietnam between 1962 and 1975, served in a combat theater after Nov. 11, 1998, or were discharged on or after Jan. 28, 2003 (for a period of five years after that discharge)

**Priority Group 7** Veterans who have incomes below the geographically adjusted threshold for their resident locations, and agree to pay co-pays

**Priority Group 8** Veterans with gross household incomes above the VA national threshold who agree to pay co-pays

If you do not belong to a group, see your local VA medical center eligibility adviser for other options. You may also use a Priority Group 8 calculator:

 [www.military.com/contentfiles/priority-group-8-enrollment-calculator.html](http://www.military.com/contentfiles/priority-group-8-enrollment-calculator.html)

Do you have a question for Department of North Carolina Service Officer Cajun Comeau about the claims process or veterans benefits in general? Send it to [askso@legion.org](mailto:askso@legion.org).



American Legion Past National Commander Ron Conley, center, participates in the ribbon-cutting of a new Fisher House built in part with \$225,000 in Pennsylvania Legion donations. Photo by Scott Goldsmith

## TROOP SUPPORT

## 'A domino effect'

In December, the Fisher House Foundation opened its 58th home. Construction of the 9,500-square-foot Pittsburgh Fisher House was funded by many individuals and groups, but the biggest contribution – \$225,000 – came from The American Legion Department of Pennsylvania.

"The house wouldn't have been possible without the support of the Legion," said Ken Fisher, Fisher House chairman and CEO.

In 2008, VAPHS joined the Legion, Auxiliary and Sons of The American Legion in fundraising efforts. "We went out and talked about it, preached about it and made connections with people," said Past National Commander Ron Conley, currently manager of Allegheny County Veterans Affairs. "And those people made connections with someone else. It's a domino effect, and people want to be a part of the common good, supporting our nation's veterans."

All 800 Pennsylvania Legion posts were encouraged to contribute, and families of recently deceased veterans asked people to contribute to the Pittsburgh Fisher House in lieu of flowers, raising thousands. Through the Combined Federal Campaign (CFC), VAPHS employees gave more than \$325,000 in deductions from their paychecks.

"There are no words that can express my gratitude for seeing a Fisher House built here," Conley said. "It gives an opportunity to families to connect with their loved ones during a critical time of their rehabilitation."

 [www.pittsburghfisherhouse.org](http://www.pittsburghfisherhouse.org)

## FOREIGN AFFAIRS

## Japan awakens

89  
50

Percent of Japan's lower house supporting Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's goal to revise the post-World War II constitution to lift limits on military action

Percent of Japanese voters favoring revising the constitution, up from 41 percent in 2009

Source: Reuters



# The First The Last The ONLY!



Actual size  
is 30.6 mm

## 50 Years later the 1964 Silver Proof Set still shines bright

On November 25, 1963, just three days after the tragedy in Dallas, the U.S. Mint began work on the 90% Silver Kennedy Half Dollar. It would prove to be one of the most popular half dollar designs in our nation's history. Not surprisingly, when Americans discovered that the brand new Kennedy Half Dollar was the centerpiece of the 1964 U.S. Silver Proof Set, demand immediately soared through the roof!

By January 11th, 1964, the Mint was forced to halt orders for the 1964 Silver Proof Set, and eventually had to reduce the original maximum order of 100 Proof Sets down to just 2 sets per buyer in the face of such staggering demand. Finally, on March 12, even the limit of 2 sets was halted because the Mint received orders for 200,000 Proof Sets in just two days!

Fifty years later, the 1964 Silver Proof Set is still in great demand.

Why? Because this set is chock full of "Firsts", "Lasts" and "Onlys":

### 1964 Proof Set Firsts, Lasts & Onlys

- ✓ The **FIRST** year Kennedy Half Dollar Proof
- ✓ The **FIRST** Proof set to feature a former president on every coin
- ✓ The **LAST** Proof Set struck at the Philadelphia Mint
- ✓ The **LAST** year the Roosevelt Dime, Washington Quarter and Kennedy Half Dollar were struck in 90% silver for regular production
- ✓ The **ONLY** 90% Silver Kennedy Half Dollar Proof ever minted for regular production
- ✓ The **ONLY** Kennedy Half Dollar Proof struck at the Philadelphia Mint

As we approach the 50th Anniversary of JFK's 1963 assassination this year, the 1964 U.S. Silver Proof Set is back into the spotlight again. Each set contains the 1964 Lincoln Cent and Jefferson

Nickel, along with three 90% Silver coins: the Silver Roosevelt Dime, Silver Washington Quarter, and the 1964 Silver Kennedy Half Dollar—the only 90% Kennedy Half Dollar ever struck for regular production.

### Saved from destruction—but how many sets survived?

Collectors know that the key is to find those sets still preserved in the original U.S. Mint "flat pack" just as issued. And over the past 50 years, that has become more and more difficult! Since this set was issued, silver prices have risen from \$1.29 per ounce to over \$48 per ounce at the silver market's high mark. During that climb, it is impossible to determine how many of these 1964 Proof Sets have been melted for their precious silver content. The packaging on thousands of other sets has been cut apart to remove the silver coins—so there is no way to know for certain how many 1964 U.S. Proof Sets have survived to this day.

### Order now—Satisfaction Guaranteed

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## TROOP SUPPORT

## New line of support for Heroes to Hometowns

*H2H's expansive national network combines with OCW's resource pool to provide greater service to returning vets.*

BY ANDY ROMEY

The American Legion's Heroes to Hometowns (H2H) program has been consolidated into Operation Comfort Warriors (OCW), but it is alive and as strong as ever.

H2H provides transition assistance, helping injured servicemembers returning home by connecting them with American Legion department H2H coordinators nationwide. But thanks to the merger created by Resolution 12, passed by the National Executive Committee last October, these coordinators now have access to the resources of OCW – the Legion's flagship program providing comfort items and recreational activities to wounded servicemembers.

The benefits of bringing H2H under the OCW banner are numerous. The merger cuts down on administration costs associated with running two similar programs, and it allows H2H to accept and disburse donations from an official nonprofit organization with 501(c)(3) tax-deductible status.

Most importantly, the two programs can provide greater service together than either could alone. Legion departments' H2H coordinators can now draw on resources available under OCW.

Sunny Farrand, the main transition assistance contact for the Department of California, has seen firsthand the merger's benefits. Farrand arranged OCW sponsorship of Christmas dinners for troops in a warrior transition unit at Balboa Naval Hospital in San Diego, made possible largely because of his access to OCW resources.

"I'm really satisfied with the move, putting Heroes to Hometowns under the OCW umbrella," Farrand said. "The problem we had with H2H was ... it was an all-volunteer program with no funding."



*San Diego-area Legionnaires distribute OCW backpacks during the Warrior Games at Camp Pendleton, Calif., on Feb. 27.*

Photo by Jamie Scott Lytle

Farrand and his assistant, Jennie McFarling, maintain an active presence on social media to reach veterans in every nook of California who need assistance. Having OCW's backing has allowed them to better help veterans, specifically those who are ineligible for Temporary Financial Assistance because they don't have children. Such veterans are becoming more visible thanks to Facebook.

"I'll get a Facebook message from one of them, saying 'Mom, help!' And I'll know that I need to get online and chat with them immediately to help them with whatever the problem is, whether it's trouble with the family or just general life issues," says McFarling, a Legion Rider.

Still, Farrand finds veterans through traditional methods, too. A few years ago, Farrand learned about a wounded Marine, Charlie Linville, whose house was burglarized while he was away during the holidays. In all, it had \$10,000 in damage, and Linville's Purple Heart was stolen.

Farrand quickly raised money to replace the family's laptop computer. He later worked with the military community to replace the Purple Heart, complete with proper annotations and markings.

On top of all that, Farrand house-sat for the family when they went away for the holidays the following year.

"We hadn't been home for the holidays in awhile," Linville said. "So Sunny offered to stay there as a house sitter for four or five days. It was nice to have that peace of mind that our house wasn't going to get robbed again."

## EDUCATION

## Unused GI Bill benefit may not be eligible for transfer



**Q:** *I was discharged from the Air Force in November 1973 after serving four years. I never used my original GI Bill benefit and was wondering if I still could. I'd like to transfer my eligibility to my grandson, who will be going to college in two years.*

**A:** Unfortunately, you cannot transfer your benefit to your grandson. But you may want to look into the Veterans

Retraining Assistance Program (VRAP), which offers 12 months of training assistance to veterans who meet the following criteria:

- At least 35, but no older than 60
- Unemployed on the date of application
- Received an other-than-dishonorable discharge
- Not eligible for any other VA education benefit program (e.g., the Post-9/11 GI Bill, the Montgomery GI Bill, vocational rehabilitation and employment assistance)
- Not in receipt of VA compensation due to unemployability
- Not enrolled in a federal or state job-training program

*Valerie Heffner, a Marine Corps veteran and member of American Legion Post 27 in Arizona, is a past vice president of the National Association of Veterans' Program Administrators.*  
[askvalerie@legion.org](mailto:askvalerie@legion.org)



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## PERSONAL FINANCE



## New addition means new approach to financial planning

There are a lot of families currently in growth mode – the kind that comes with sleepless nights and diaper changes. A study from the U.S. Department of Agriculture indicates that it will take a typical family almost \$235,000 to raise a child, so here are some important things to think about if a baby is on the way.

### For the grandparents:

■ **Lend a hand.** Many parents, especially those stepping into the role for the first time, underestimate the amount of time and effort that goes into raising a baby. This can have a detrimental effect on both their finances and their marriages. Help new parents carve out some quality time with each other and save them the cost of a babysitter by sponsoring a night out.

With so many demands on their time, new parents may be inclined to order or eat out often. Prepare and freeze some home-cooked meals that are easy and inexpensive. By being available to help, you get to spend time with the new grandchild and help your family financially.

■ **Share your wisdom.** New parents are notorious for turning bouncing bundles of joy into bundles of debt. They spend too much on nurseries, cute things and clothes that fit for no time at all. Share your own experiences on this front to provide guidance without being too pushy; the savings will be substantial.

### For the parents:

■ **Check life insurance.** As with any major life event, the arrival of a baby is an opportune time to ensure you've got adequate life insurance. With a price tag of \$235,000 – not

### FOCUS ON FINANCES



J.J. MONTANARO

including college – you want to make sure you have your bases covered. Use the online calculator at [usaa.com](http://usaa.com) to see where you stand.

■ **Bone up on the tax code.** Tax benefits like the child tax credit and child care credit are all part of the lexicon of parenthood. Get familiar with the rules, and don't leave any money on the table. There will be plenty of opportunities to use it.

### For both:

■ **Save for college.** According to the College Board, a four-year public-college education currently runs about \$17,000 for tuition, fees, room and board. Combine that fact with inflation increases trending north of 5 percent, and you need to start saving sooner rather than later. Parents and grandparents can both use tax-advantaged 529 college savings plans to get the ball rolling.

■ **Update your will.** Grandparents may want to update their estate plans to reflect their wishes with respect to a new grandchild. And the baby's parents should do the same. For parents, a will is critical because it names both the physical and financial caretaker for the baby if something happens to you. You don't want any confusion regarding these instructions.

Whether the new baby resides under your roof or you just get to spoil him or her, make sure this stuff gets done.

*J.J. Montanaro is a certified financial planner for USAA, The American Legion's preferred provider of financial services. Submit questions for him online.*

[www.legion.org/focusonfinances](http://www.legion.org/focusonfinances)

## POLLS

## Americans' trust in government sours

"Trust in the federal government remains mired near a historic low, while frustration with government remains high," the Pew Research Center reports, citing new polling data. When asked, "Does the federal government threaten your personal rights and freedoms?" here's how Americans responded:

	Percent saying YES	Percent saying NO
2013	53	43
2010	47	50
2003	45	54
2002	32	63
1995	36	62

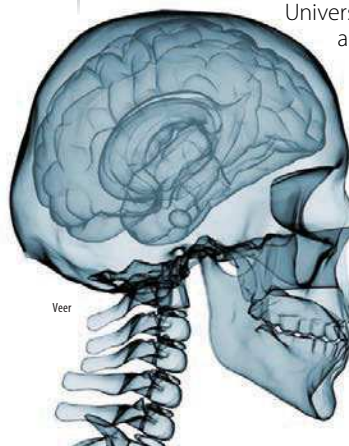
Read more online:

[www.people-press.org](http://www.people-press.org)

## VERBATIM

“The guys who were robust and leading the charge on this 10 years ago are now using canes.”

**James Baraniuk**, professor of medicine at Georgetown University Medical Center and senior author of a new study claiming physical proof that Gulf War illness is caused by damage to the brain. Using fMRI scans, researchers discovered anomalies in the nerve fibers that interpret pain signals. The findings could lead to quicker diagnosis and less difficulty obtaining treatment.





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## CAREERS

## What professional skills matter most?



Professional skills can be separated into two distinct categories:

- **Hard skills** specific to industries and professions, such as purchasing, supply chain and inventory for logistics professionals; and
- **Soft skills** that reflect

work style and personality, and general qualifications that enhance work performance, such as efficiency, productivity and quality improvement for field engineering personnel.

Most military personnel also have a third set of valuable skills, which is why they've been so successful. These include leadership, team building, dedication, determination, honesty, reliability, camaraderie, communications, decision-making and time management.

It is vitally important to communicate all skills throughout your job search – when networking, during interviews and salary negotiations, in thank-you notes, and in your résumé, letters and LinkedIn profile. In each situation, you want to accomplish two things:

- **Showcase skills you have that relate directly to the job.** Highlight projects, positions and achievements that best demonstrate those skills in action. Show how those skills have been of value, and will continue to be of value, to the new company.

- **Bring special attention to skills that are unique to you and your career.** Bottom line, most budget administrators perform similar functions. Knowing that, what can you share about your career that makes you different from everyone else with the same job?

It is your responsibility to make sure that your skills are addressed during each interview. It's easy to integrate skills into a résumé, but they can be harder to showcase in an interview. Be prepared for each interview with the five to eight most important things to communicate.

If you sense that the interview is winding down and some skills haven't been mentioned, say, "There are a few other important items I'd like to share. Can I do that now?" Take control of the interview, share your skills, and position yourself as the No. 1 candidate.

Wendy Enelow is co-author of "Expert Résumés for Military-to-Civilian Transitions" and "Executive Résumé Toolkit."

## TECHNOLOGY

## New Claims Coach app available

A new, more efficient American Legion Claims Coach smartphone app is now available from the Apple iTunes store or Google Play.

The app provides step-by-step guidance for veterans working through the VA claims process with a service officer. The enhancements, based on feedback from users of the original app, include an updated directory of accredited American Legion service officers nationwide. The new directory links live to the Legion's service-officer database to provide updated information each time the app is launched.

The Claims Coach's directory is now searchable by state instead of by ZIP code. Search results for each state now include an "Other Resources" button that will link veterans from the app to that state's Department of Veterans Affairs website.

This is an entirely new app, not an upgrade. Current users can choose to download the new app and delete the old version from their device or continue the claim process with the original version.

For those without smartphones, a piece of third-party software provides access to the Claims Coach on your computer desktop. Go to [www.legion.org/mobileapps](http://www.legion.org/mobileapps) and click on "Use the Claims Coach on Your Desktop" for a set of easy instructions.

To download the app, visit [www.legion.org/mobileapps](http://www.legion.org/mobileapps). A user guide is also available for download.



## FACEBOOK

## More ways to 'like' the Legion

Following The American Legion on Facebook has never been easier, more fun or informative. You're invited to follow us on these pages, which range from general news to specific interests:

**The American Legion National Headquarters** | News and updates on the national commander, program information and deadlines

**The American Legion Online Update** | News feed featuring stories from Legion digital media as well as external stories, photos and videos of interest

**National American Legion Riders** | Legion Riders activities, announcements and accomplishments

**The American Legion Burn Pit** | Keep up with the Burn Pit blog site

**Citizens Flag Alliance** | News about the U.S. flag, including related legislation and The American Legion's efforts to protect it from desecration

## OTHER PROGRAM PAGES

**American Legion Baseball**

**American Legion World Series**

**Operation Comfort Warriors**

**The American Legion National Convention**

**Foreign & Outlying Departments and Posts of The American Legion (FODPAL)**

**The American Legion Youth Programs Alumni Association**

Find links to these and other pages online.

 [www.legion.org/facebook](http://www.legion.org/facebook)





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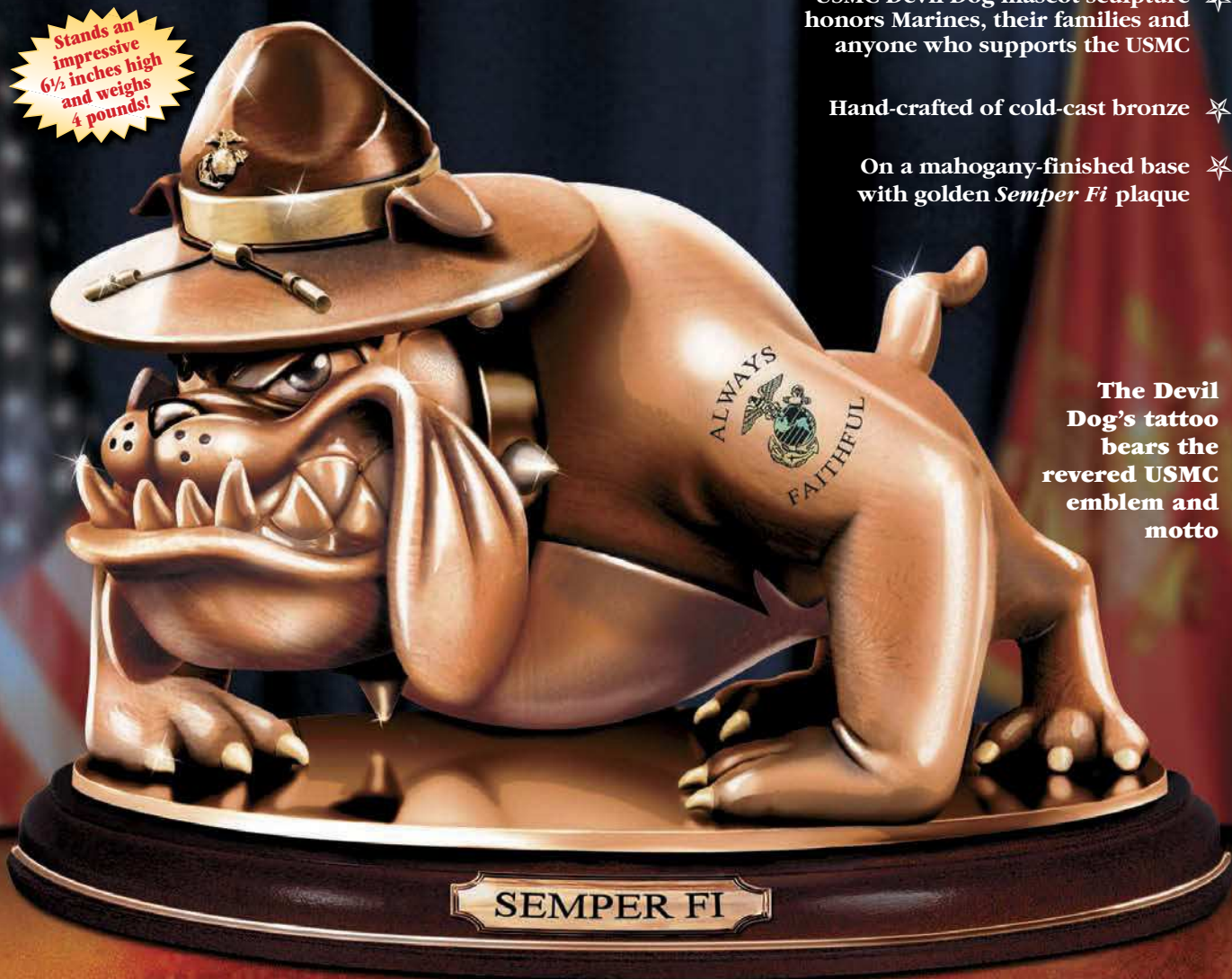
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## How to submit a reunion

The American Legion Magazine publishes reunion notices for veterans. Send notices to **The American Legion Magazine, Attn: Reunions, P.O. Box 1055, Indianapolis, IN 46206**, fax (317) 630-1280, e-mail [reunions@legion.org](mailto:reunions@legion.org) or submit information via our website, [www.legion.org/reunions](http://www.legion.org/reunions).

Include the branch of service and complete name of the group, no abbreviations, with your request. The listing also should include the reunion dates and city, along with a contact name, telephone number and e-mail address. Listings are publicized free of charge.

Your notice will appear on our Web site within a week and will remain available online until the final day of your reunion. Upon submission, please allow three months for your reunion to be published in print. **Due to the large number of reunions, The American Legion Magazine will publish a group's listing only once a year.**

Notices should be sent at least six months prior to the reunion to ensure timely publication.

## Other notices

"In Search Of" is a means of getting in touch with people from your unit to plan a reunion. **We do not publish listings that seek people for interviews, research purposes, military photos or help in filing a VA claim.** Listings must include the name of the unit from which you seek people, the time period and the location, as well as a contact name, telephone number and e-mail address. Send notices to **The American Legion Magazine, Attn: "In Search Of," P.O. Box 1055, Indianapolis, IN 46206**, fax (317) 630-1280 or e-mail [reunions@legion.org](mailto:reunions@legion.org).

The magazine will not publish names of individuals, only the name of the unit. Listings are published free of charge.

Life Membership notices are published for Legionnaires who have been awarded life

memberships by their posts. **This does not include a member's own Paid-Up-For-Life membership.** Notices must be submitted on official forms, which may be obtained by sending a self-addressed stamped envelope to **The American Legion Magazine, Attn: Life Memberships, P.O. Box 1055, Indianapolis, IN 46206.**

"Comrades in Distress" listings must be approved by the Legion's Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation division. If you are seeking to verify an injury received during service, contact your Legion department service officer for information on how to publish a notice.

To respond to a "Comrades in Distress" listing, send a letter to **The American Legion Magazine, Attn: Comrades in Distress, P.O. Box 1055, Indianapolis, IN 46206.** Include the listing's CID number in your response.

"Taps" notices are published only for Legionnaires who served as department commanders or national officers.

## AIR FORCE / ARMY AIR FORCES

**3rd A&E (Yokota AB)**, Branson, MO, 9/16-18, Bill Jackson, (417) 779-0387, [www.4bjackson@yahoo.com](http://www.4bjackson@yahoo.com); **13th AF Vets Assn**, Indianapolis, 9/18-21, Phil Dyer, (231) 843-9597; **18th FIS**, Dayton, OH, 9/9-13, Jim Sidebottom, (303) 913-9104, [sidebottomj@hotmail.com](mailto:sidebottomj@hotmail.com); **20th & 81st Tact Ftr Wings**, San Antonio, 9/25-29, Dave Hayes, (330) 225-7153; **20th EMS/AGE Branch (RAF Upper Heyford, 1985-1993)**, Dayton/Wright Patterson AFB, OH, 6/21-22, Bruce Harp, (765) 460-5077, [bharp72@hotmail.com](mailto:bharp72@hotmail.com); **22nd TCS/MAS**, Pueblo, CO, 6/4-6, Henry Trujillo, (719) 545-4146, [alute@comcast.net](mailto:alute@comcast.net); **36th TFW (Bitburg AB, Germany)**, Tempe, AZ, 10/4-6, Dale Kurth, (480) 945-0532, [dkurth76@cox.net](mailto:dkurth76@cox.net); **49th Ftr Interceptor Sqdn**, Dallas, 10/3-6, Ron Morrisette, (972) 530-4647, [ronmorri1@verizon.net](mailto:ronmorri1@verizon.net); **339th Ftr Sqdn (1941-2013)**, Duluth, MN, 9/23-27, Robert Murphy, (386) 364-1454, [arm221@windstream.net](mailto:arm221@windstream.net); **343rd SRS**, Branson, MO, 9/18-20, Paul F. Dolby Jr., (260) 356-1761, [paul343rdsrs@yahoo.com](mailto:paul343rdsrs@yahoo.com)

**492nd & 467th BG (H)**, San Antonio, 6/26-30, Fran Gramberg, (708) 670-8084, [fgramberg@msn.com](mailto:fgramberg@msn.com); **504th Bomb Grp (Tinian, 1945)**, Washington, 9/20-24, Kaz Barcynski, (252) 637-0587, [mskb134@gmail.com](mailto:mskb134@gmail.com); **526th FIS/ TFS**, Tucson, AZ, 10/10-13, Joe Shambo, (520) 572-4636, [eshambo618@gmail.com](mailto:eshambo618@gmail.com); **866th Eng Avn Bn**, Davenport, IA, 7/26-28, Karen Cheatham Baumbach, (404) 843-1377, [baumbach@bellsouth.net](mailto:baumbach@bellsouth.net); **6922nd Sec Wing Det 4 (Udorn, Thailand)**, Newtown, CT, 6/6-9, Dave Minnery, (847) 359-3578, [minnery@sbcglobal.net](mailto:minnery@sbcglobal.net); **AF Communicators & Air Traffic Controllers**, Knoxville, TN, 9/18-22, Hank Sauer, (865) 705-0829, [diraacs@comcast.net](mailto:diraacs@comcast.net); **AF Security Forces Assn**, Tampa, FL, 9/19-21, Jerry Bullock, (888) 250-9876, [jerry.bullock193@gmail.com](mailto:jerry.bullock193@gmail.com); **Bien Hoa AFB**, Fairborn, OH, 8/22-24, Tim Pierce, (864) 653-7510, [tap6869nam@gmail.com](mailto:tap6869nam@gmail.com); **C-7A Caribou Assn (Vietnam)**, Seattle, 10/9-13, Pat Hanavan, (210) 479-0226, [patthanavan@aol.com](mailto:patthanavan@aol.com)

**Pilot Tng Class 55-Victor**, Savannah, GA, 9/23-27, Buzz Broussard, (337) 589-9604, [arthurbroussard@gmail.com](mailto:arthurbroussard@gmail.com); **RAF Burtonwood Assn (1941-1993)**, Grapevine, TX, 10/15-19, Jim Bentley, (813) 689-0199, [jben0214@aol.com](mailto:jben0214@aol.com); **Retired Fire Chiefs**, Wilmington, NC, 8/6-8, Charles Richardson, (386) 760-6286, [clardb@att.net](mailto:clardb@att.net); **Spooky AC-47 Gunship**, Washington, 9/5-8, Junior Skinner, (706) 636-5375, [juncherski@embarq.com](mailto:juncherski@embarq.com); **U.S. Radar Sites Iceland - 677th, 932nd, 933rd & 934th AC&W**, Oklahoma City, 10/7-11, William Chick, (803) 422-9486, [littlechick@msn.com](mailto:littlechick@msn.com); **USAF Pilot Class 55-India**, Branson, MO, 9/10-14, Darold Korzan, (660)

463-5799, [korzan@centurytel.net](mailto:korzan@centurytel.net); **Women in the AF Assn**, Salt Lake City, 9/11-16, Veda Jones, (435) 613-9537, [vedaj40@emerytelcom.net](mailto:vedaj40@emerytelcom.net)

## ARMY

**1-70 Armor Bn**, Weisbaden, Germany, 10/3-7, Sam Rushing, (501) 628-6311, [sarushing@netzero.net](mailto:sarushing@netzero.net); **1st Bn 77th Armrd Rgt "Steel Tigers"**, Bozeman, MT, 8/22-25, Rick Benson, (406) 570-5655, [wyvern237@aol.com](mailto:wyvern237@aol.com); **2nd Bn 34th Armor (Vietnam)**, Branson, MO, 10/3-6, Pat Forster, (949) 493-4080, [ltpat234@hotmail.com](mailto:ltpat234@hotmail.com); **3rd Bn 8th Inf Ivry Dragons**, Gatlinburg, TN, 7/25-28, Steve Edmunds, (949) 294-6981, [edmundsdb@aol.com](mailto:edmundsdb@aol.com); **5th Bn 42nd Field Arty**, Colorado Springs, CO, 9/5-8, Charlie Morton, (407) 463-2086, [reunion2013charlie@aol.com](mailto:reunion2013charlie@aol.com); **5th Cav, 1st Air Cav Div**, Gatlinburg, TN, 8/20-24, John Ulloa, (808) 221-9560, [johnulloa@hawaii.rr.com](mailto:johnulloa@hawaii.rr.com)

**12th Armd Div**, St. Louis, 7/31-8/4, Mary Anne Delker, (636) 928-5391, [mdelker@att.net](mailto:mdelker@att.net); **15th Constabulary Sqdn**, Milwaukee, 9/12-14, Horace Saldi, (301) 384-1168, [salldog1@comcast.net](mailto:salldog1@comcast.net); **20th Eng Bde Vietnam Vets**, New Orleans, 7/26-28, Gerald Manint, (217) 678-8159, [gmanint@mediacombb.net](mailto:gmanint@mediacombb.net); **24th Trans Co "Truckmasters"**, Fort Riley, KS, 7/19-20, Ronald Dunlap, (540) 877-3542, [retread@24thtruckmasters.net](mailto:retread@24thtruckmasters.net); **27th Inf Rgt "Wolfhounds"**, Irvine, CA, 8/25-9/1, John Coon, (949) 334-7745, [johncoon.d127@gmail.com](mailto:johncoon.d127@gmail.com); **28th Inf Div Assn**, Annnville, PA, 9/4-7, Gwenn Underwood, (717) 944-6721, [gwennu45@gmail.com](mailto:gwennu45@gmail.com); **30th ADA Bde (Okinawa)**, Kansas City, MO, 9/12-14, John Sanderson, (620) 342-0874, [johnsanderson@hotmail.com](mailto:johnsanderson@hotmail.com); **32nd Grp - 430th, 434th & 439th Eng Const Bn (Korean War)**, St. Louis, 8/9-11, David Mikusch, (636) 797-2323, [hardwork50@sbcglobal.net](mailto:hardwork50@sbcglobal.net); **34th Eng Bn**, San Antonio, 8/15-18, Brian Hamor, (207) 244-1151, [npcr@aol.com](mailto:npcr@aol.com); **39th Inf Rgt**, Indianapolis, 8/1-3, Cal Meyer, (406) 600-0888, [lzambush239@msn.com](mailto:lzambush239@msn.com)

**46th Eng Bn**, Monument, CO, 9/12-15, MerriAnn Anderson, (616) 361-5973, [merriann.anderson@sbcglobal.net](mailto:merriann.anderson@sbcglobal.net); **70th Eng Bn (Cbt)**, Branson, MO, 6/7-9, Roger Rock, (775) 623-1029, [70engrs@gmail.com](mailto:70engrs@gmail.com); **84th Eng Bn (Const) (Vietnam)**, Fort Leonard Wood/Waynesville, MO, 6/20-23, R.L. Wallner, (810) 714-4158, [rlwallner@charter.net](mailto:rlwallner@charter.net); **118th MP Co (Abn) (Fort Bragg, NC)**, Fayetteville, NC, 5/17-19, Mitchell Rubenstein, (516) 381-5906, [mitchrubecsm@yahoo.com](mailto:mitchrubecsm@yahoo.com); **119th AHC (Vietnam)**, Fort Rucker/Dothan, AL, 9/10-12, Tom Frankenfield, [frankenfield@cfl.rr.com](mailto:frankenfield@cfl.rr.com); **148th Inf Rgt 37th Div**, Camp Perry,

Port Clinton, OH, 8/23-24, Steve Whitcraft, (419) 203-8340, [ckst@watchtv.net](mailto:ckst@watchtv.net); **179th ASHC Shrimp Boats & 402nd**, Washington, 10/4-6, John Carrington, (313) 254-4873, [oakheli@att.net](mailto:oakheli@att.net); **180th ASHC/403**, Washington, 10/4-6, John Carrington, (313) 254-4873, [oakheli@att.net](mailto:oakheli@att.net); **199th Light Inf Bde**, Las Vegas, 10/2-6, Tony Lato, (702) 361-7208, [alatojr@aol.com](mailto:alatojr@aol.com); **219th Avn Co (Recon) "Headhunters" (Vietnam, 1965-1972)**, Boulder, CO, 9/19-22, Bob Brewster, (386) 341-0423, [bob@219headhunters.com](mailto:bob@219headhunters.com); **221st Avn Co/199th Recon Airplane Co (Delta Birdog)**, League City, TX, 9/26-29, Don Smith, (281) 973-9805, [shotgun-8a@hotmail.com](mailto:shotgun-8a@hotmail.com); **299th Eng Bn**, Branson, MO, 8/8-11, James Nelson, (616) 755-5517; **321st Trans Co "Can Do" (Long Binh, Vietnam, 1967-1973)**, Branson, MO, 6/12-16, Chuck Roberts, (785) 271-5969; **398th AAA AW Bn (Korea)**, Branson, MO, 10/7-10, Arlie Schemmer, (636) 228-4474; **440th Sig Bn**, Tucson, AZ, 10/1-3, Al Landsperger, (803) 475-9159, [allands55@windstream.net](mailto:allands55@windstream.net); **509th Radio Research Comm Unit (ASA Davis Station, Vietnam)**, Milwaukee, WI, 5/20-23, Donald Mortensen, (715) 572-8214, [2013milwaukeeereunion@gmail.com](mailto:2013milwaukeeereunion@gmail.com)

**511th Engrs (PB)**, Sacramento, CA, 6/7-9, Clyde Phillips, (530) 622-6999, [genephil@cwnet.com](mailto:genephil@cwnet.com); **560th Sig Bn**, Atlanta, 9/13-15, Joe Vivona, (404) 872-8302, [jbvivona@gmail.com](mailto:jbvivona@gmail.com); **709th MP Bn (Germany, All Eras)**, Erlanger, KY, 10/17-19, Louise Stack, (414) 764-0365, [kilostack@att.net](mailto:kilostack@att.net); **919th Eng Co**, Colorado Springs, CO, 6/19-23, Kenneth Wood, (336) 668-4531, [woodkp@hotmail.com](mailto:woodkp@hotmail.com); **Alaska Polar Bear Patch**, Dayton, OH, 9/16-19, Don Bayt, (727) 289-6668, [conniebayt@msn.com](mailto:conniebayt@msn.com); **ASA Baumholder 8611**, West Point, NY, 10/6-10, Bob Sperling, (315) 866-4325, [rasperli@tcwny.rr.com](mailto:rasperli@tcwny.rr.com); **ASA Korea Vets**, Nashville, TN, 9/22-26, Bob Richter, (615) 316-1062, [beastshoe@aol.com](mailto:beastshoe@aol.com); **Avel Central Vietnam**, Washington, 10/16-20, Jack McCabe, (847) 778-3473, [jmccabe51@gmail.com](mailto:jmccabe51@gmail.com); **AZ ASA Assn**, Mesa, AZ, 8/16-18, Jerry Darr, (480) 507-6825, [ardf308@gmail.com](mailto:ardf308@gmail.com)

**Battle of the Bulge Vets**, Kansas City, MO, 9/3-8, Ralph Bozorth, (610) 825-9409, [ralph608@comcast.net](mailto:ralph608@comcast.net); **Det 2, 3rd & 11th RRU**, Galveston, TX, 8/2-9, Joe Button, (254) 290-2483, [buttondj@embarqmail.com](mailto:buttondj@embarqmail.com); **Dusters, Quads, Searchlights, Vulcans & Hawks (Vietnam)**, Oklahoma City, 8/7-11, Bruce Geiger, (914) 576-1050, [bmgeiger@aol.com](mailto:bmgeiger@aol.com); **Echo Co 2/5th Cav**, Fort Benning, GA, 10/9-12, Michael DeHart, (937) 335-2131, [michael.dehart754@gmail.com](mailto:michael.dehart754@gmail.com); **Mars Task Force & Descendants**, Bloomington, MN, 8/29-9/1, Jerrie Daly, (651) 204-5004, [mmpdtreas@gmail.com](mailto:mmpdtreas@gmail.com); **OV-1 Mohawk Assn (Grumman)**, Savannah, GA, 9/5-7, Paul Jacobsen, (763)



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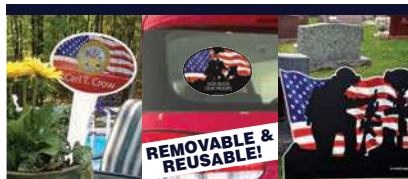
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*I think my boss is trying to replace me.  
He's looking for a computer that grovels.*

**AN OLD MAN** was holding court, surrounded by his children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

"Don't think of me as an old man," he whined. "I'm healthy. Everything's fine. My heart's still pumping away. My liver's strong. And my mind, knock on wood ... Hello? Who is it?"

**TWO FRIENDS** arranged to meet at a store in the local mall. One never showed up, so the other went home. When they got together that night, the second woman asked the first what had happened.

"It was terrible," the first woman said. "I was on the escalator on my way to meet you, and it suddenly stopped running. I stood there for over an hour while they fixed it."

"You stood on the escalator for an hour while they fixed it?" the second friend asked.

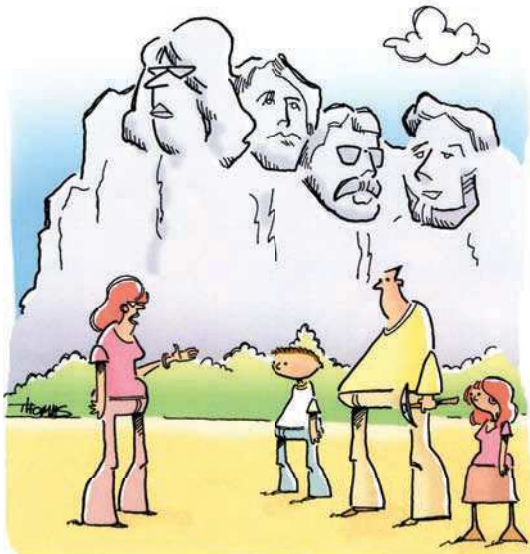
"Of course. What else could I do?"

"You dummy! Why didn't you sit down?"

**AN AIRLINER** flew into a violent thunderstorm and began experiencing turbulence. One nervous passenger happened to be sitting next to a minister and turned to him for comfort.

"Can't you do something?" she asked.

"I'm sorry, ma'am," he replied gently, "but I'm in sales, not management."



"I have to admit it. You guys outdid yourselves this Mother's Day."



"No matter how high in the military you get,  
you can't outrank your mom."



"I'm going to put you on hold now."

**A WOMAN** asked her husband, "Could you please go out and buy a gallon of milk? And if they have avocados, get six."

A short time later, the husband returned with six gallons of milk.

"Why did you buy so many?" his wife asked.

"They had avocados."

**AN IRATE DRIVER** went back to the garage where he had bought an expensive car battery six months ago. He said to the garage owner, "When you sold me this battery, you told me it would be the last one my car would ever need. It's dead!"

"Yeah, sorry about that," the owner replied. "I didn't think your car would make it this long."

**"AL-QAIDA"** has issued a list of 22 ways that al-Qaida members can avoid being killed by U.S. drones. Here's a good one: Don't join al-Qaida."

– Jay Leno





# DEFECTIVE HIP REPLACEMENT

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## ZIMMER, INC

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## BIOMET

- M2A Magnum

## WRIGHT, INC.

- Conserve Cup Total Hip

## STRYKER

- Rejuvenate and ABG II

If you or a family member have had one or both hips replaced since **2002**, and do not know the name of the manufacturer of your hip prosthesis or replacement device, but are having problems from pain, mobility or other concerns, then you may be entitled to compensation for the defective hip replacement device. The Branch Law Firm, a nationally known law firm, is handling these type cases and specifically representing clients on a national basis regarding the following hip devices: **Depuy ASR, Depuy Pinnacle, Zimmer Durom, Wright, Biomet M2A Magnum and Stryker Rejuvenate and ABG II**. Call for a confidential interview, **1-800-828-4529** or **1-800-243-3534** and visit our website at **[www.branchlawfirm.com](http://www.branchlawfirm.com)**.

*Turner W. Branch, a principal and senior partner of the Branch Law Firm, retired as a 1st Lieutenant in the United States Marine Corps in 1968. He served on active duty in Camp Pendleton, California and at the Marine Corps Air Facility (MCAF) in Santa Ana, California. While at Camp Pendleton he served with the Second Battalion, Fifth Marines, First Marine Division (FMF) USMC.*

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